

Iranians hold nationwide rallies to denounce Israel

TEHRAN (R) — Large crowds chanting "Death to Israel" and "Death to America" marched on Friday in Tehran and burned an Israeli flag and an Uncle Sam puppet to mark a nationwide day of protests against the Jewish state.

Marchers hoisted banners reading "Israel must be destroyed" and "Israel is a cancerous tumour in the region," and carried portraits of Iran's late leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his successor Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Near the Tehran University campus, some marchers burned an Israeli flag and an Uncle Sam puppet, drawing cheers from the crowd which included wheelchair-bound veterans of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

Moderate President Mohammad Khatami joined the march near the campus as enthusiastic youths tried to shake his hand.

The march was part of rallies marking "World Quds [Jerusalem] Day," the last Friday of the fasting month of Ramadan dedicated to protests against Israel and support for Palestinians.

The crowds, including women in traditional black

chadors and youths wearing khaki outfits and colourful headbands reading Allahu Akbar (God is the Greatest), streamed through Tehran streets to Friday prayers were led by influential former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

"I do not think Israel was really created to save the Jews and give them a homeland, it was instead a move by colonialism and arrogance in which the Jews were used," Rafsanjani, a Shiite Muslim cleric, told worshippers.

"Israel has recreated colonial conditions... by boosting orders to Western arms manufacturing companies from oil-rich countries and launching an unending arms race," he said.

"America and the West in general have a policy today, as did Britain in the past, to keep Israel militarily stronger than neighbouring states," he added.

Rafsanjani slammed the Middle East peace process, saying Israel could not be trusted to carry out accords it had signed.

"The [peace] plan has been a calamity for the Muslim nation by provoking disputes among Palestinians, in which the Pales-

tinian Authority, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad fight and neutralise each other," Rafsanjani said.

A resolution read at the rally called for "continued resistance and struggle until the disappearance of the aggressive Zionist regime [Israel]."

State television broadcast footage of similar marches in cities throughout Iran. It said other rallies were held in several countries including Lebanon, India and Malaysia.

Rafsanjani also called on conservative and moderate factions to "turn down the volume of debates" in a bitter row over a spate of killings of intellectuals and dissidents.

He said all senior Iranian officials were determined to carry out to the end the investigations into the murders.

Moderates backing Khatami, who has spearheaded the investigations, have demanded a purge of the conservative-run Intelligence Ministry after revelations that some of its agents were involved in the recent killings.

But conservatives have denied responsibility, with some hardliners accusing backers of Khatami for the murders.



A pro-Iranian Hizbollah woman supporter, wearing a chador, stands and raises a box to gather money for the group during a parade held in Beirut's suburbs on Friday to mark the last Friday of Ramadan. This day is observed throughout the Muslim World to denounce Israel and its staunch ally the U.S. (Reuters photo)

Eight years after Gulf War, allied weapons poised for fresh fight

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Sunday marks the eighth anniversary of the start of the 1991 Gulf War, but U.S. and British weapons are still aimed at Iraq and Baghdad has remained defiant in the face of their threats.

After surviving four days of deadly U.S. and British missile attacks last month, Baghdad has intensified the confrontation by ordering attacks on all allied planes patrolling "no-fly" zones in Iraq.

Nearly every day sees violent clashes between Iraq air or ground forces and the western allies' aircraft, and Iraqi jets are making regular incursions into the northern and southern zones.

"It's a dangerous situation because it could get out of hand at any moment," a Baghdad-based diplomat said, adding that it was impossible to predict Washington and London's response if they lost an aircraft.

The United States and

Britain's aerial presence in Iraq has been a permanent feature since the Gulf war, which was launched in the early hours of Jan. 17, 1991, with air strikes.

Since then the aircraft have been involved mainly in patrolling the no-fly zones in the north, created in 1991, and in the south, set up one year later.

The Gulf War air strikes lasted six weeks and amounted to one of the largest air campaigns since World War II.

The strikes were followed up by an attack by ground troops from a U.S.-led coalition of more than 30 countries. They took less than two days to eject Iraqi troops from Kuwait after a seven-month occupation.

"The war's objective was clear — chase Iraq out of Kuwait. Once done, the war could end," the diplomat said.

But he cast doubt on the effectiveness of the four military strikes on Iraq that have taken place since

then, including December's Desert Fox operation.

"The United States has still not defined Iraq's place in the region and to keep [Iraqi leader] Saddam Hussein boxed into a corner cannot be considered a policy," another European diplomat said.

"You cannot indefinitely exclude such an important country from such an important region," he added.

Washington's recent policy shift towards weakening the Baghdad regime through military means and massive funding for Iraqi opposition groups "is not credible given the questionable results of the use of force and the divisions among the opposition," he said.

The diplomat also said he was sceptical of the effectiveness of the crippling and wide-ranging U.N. embargo imposed on Iraq following its August 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

"Sanctions can destroy a

people but not a regime," he said. The sanctions have had "perverse effects" on the population but not on the regime, which has adapted to survive, the diplomat said.

One example of this, he said, was the revival of Iraq's tribal system, once banned by the ruling Baath Party.

Tribal leaders have been courted by Baghdad and given arms and favours in return for guarantees that they will maintain order in the country.

As the anniversary approaches, Iraq's media has begun singing the praises of "The mother of all battles," Saddam's description of the Gulf War.

The Alif Baa journal, edited by the information ministry, said in its latest issue that "the plot of the enemies who want to rob Iraq after the destruction... is destined for failure."

Lebanon refuses entry to Arab immigrants

BEIRUT (AFP) — Lebanon Friday refused entry to a Cyprus police boat carrying a group of mainly Arab would-be immigrants who were expelled from the east Mediterranean island after they tried to enter it illegally.

"Beirut believes there is no proof that these immigrants, none of whom is Lebanese, came from Lebanon," a government official said.

The foreign ministry has been in contact with its Cypriot counterpart, and Lebanon has informed Cyprus of its position, the official added.

A Cypriot foreign ministry official said Nicosia had an agreement with Beirut that it would be allowed to return any boats which had left Lebanon with illegal immigrants on board.

Twenty-nine people were sent back on a police launch on Thursday night several hours after being remanded in custody by a Cyprus court following their arrival on a fishing boat the day before.

The official Cyprus News Agency said they had come

from Tripoli in northern Lebanon. A total of 18 were from Iraq and six from Egypt while the rest were nationals of Burundi, Somalia and Sri Lanka as well as a Palestinian, officials said, although none carried travel documents or identity papers.

Police said the deportation of the 29 was conducted in accordance with international law.

Initial reports had said a total of 50 people had arrived on two boats from Lebanon and Turkey, prompting a search for the remaining immigrants.

But officials said Friday that only one fishing boat had apparently arrived in the Kornos area near the southern resort of Ayia Napa on Wednesday night.

Some of the boatpeople told police they had paid up to 2,000 dollars for the voyage, expecting to be taken to Greece or Italy.

Illegal immigration is on the rise in Cyprus with most illegals arriving by boat from Lebanon.

NEWS IN BRIEF

'U.S. will take action to protect flyers

SEOUL (AFP) — Defence Secretary William Cohen said today the United States would take any action necessary to fend off attacks on planes enforcing no-fly zones over Iraq. "We will take whatever action is necessary to protect our pilots," Cohen said at a press conference in Seoul where he is attending an annual security review meeting with South Korean counterpart Chun Yong-Tae. But, Cohen said "there were no basic rumours that the United States was planning air attacks against Iraq when the Muslim Holy Month of Ramadan ends this weekend. "There is no basis for the rumour of any action against North Iraq following Ramadan," Cohen said.

Turkish police detain 30 protesters

ANKARA (AP) — Police in Turkey's capital blocked a protest march Thursday against government restrictions on Islamic-style head scarves, detaining 30 people. Police stopped about 100 would-be protesters as they came out of Ankara's biggest mosque after night prayers. Police told the group its planned protest march had no authorization and took 30 people into custody when they refused to disperse, the Anatolia news service said. The night prayers are held for the Muslim Holy Month of Ramadan. Many devout Muslims believe Islamic law requires women to cover their hair.

Palestinian doctors agree to end strike

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Palestinian doctors agreed on Friday to end a strike called to protest cuts in their pay and conditions after Palestinian President Yasser Arafat agreed to reinstate their old pay package. At a meeting on Thursday night Arafat agreed to rescind a new civil service law as it applies to doctors and to reinstate allowances which doubled medical salaries, doctors' leaders said in a statement issued here. But Arafat refused one of the doctors' demands, the abolition of a five per cent "closure tax" imposed on all Palestinian civil servants to help compensate for the costs of Israeli security restrictions on the occupied territories.

Hizbollah dismisses Israeli elections

BEIRUT (R) — The leader of Lebanon's pro-Iranian Hizbollah guerrillas on Friday dismissed the prospect that an Israeli election in May would install a leader who would bring peace to occupied south Lebanon. "Those competing to head the enemy's government are the same bunch of terrorists, killers and racists who killed our people," Hassan Nasrallah told a rally in the southern suburb of Beirut, a Hizbollah stronghold and part of the so-called misery belt around the capital. He included Ehud Barak, opposition leader and former Israeli defence minister, among the "savagely invaders" who attacked Lebanon in the 1990s.

Israel issues work permits to Palestinians

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The Israeli authorities on Friday issued an extra 7,000 entry permits to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip to work in Israel. Israel has given permits to an extra 6,000 traders and businessmen, 5,000 from the West Bank and 1,000 from the Gaza Strip, bringing the total number of workers in this category to 27,000, said Shlomo Dror, spokesman for the army's civil administration. A further 850 civil servants in the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) have also been given permission to cross Israeli territory en route to the West Bank or Gaza Strip.

Palestinians fire into air during protest

DURA (AFP) — Up to 15 protesters fired in the air during a march by several hundred supporters of Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction in Dura in the south of the West Bank on Friday, witnesses said. The group, brandishing machine guns, pistols, knives and swords, was among some 400 Fatah men, most of them masked or in Arab headdresses, who marched after Friday prayers, they said. The demonstrators called for the release of Palestinians held in Israeli jails and protested at the freeze in the peace process with Israel and at U.S. and British air strikes against Iraq.

Netanyahu rival drops out of race

TEL AVIV (AP) — A challenger to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dropped out of the race Friday, saying he and another candidate were staking out the same territory. Uri Landau, chairman of parliament's powerful Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, and Moshe Arens, a former mentor of Netanyahu, both sought to oust Netanyahu as leader of the Likud Party in primaries later this month. Dropping out of the race, Landau told Israeli army radio: "It appeared that Moshe Arens has a better chance, and we're on the same square" on the political chessboard.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 477311-19
PROGRAMME TWO

15:30 Animaniacs
15:30 The Adventures of the Bush Patrol
16:00 Drama - Neighbours
16:30 (Ch.2 links with Ch.1)
17:00 French programme - Faust Pas Rever
18:15 Doc. - Omar Ben Abdul Aziz
19:00 New in French
19:15 Words of Wisdom
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Comedy - Murphy Brown
20:00 Islam in a Changing World
20:30 Drama - The Pretender
21:10 An ABC Democracy
21:20 Boston Pops Orchestra
22:00 News in English
22:30 Feature film - "Miracle Child"
23:59 Twisted
01:00 End of TX.

PRAYER TIMES

04:56 Fajr
05:11 (Sunrise) Doha
11:45 Dhuhur
14:35 'Asr
16:59 Maghreb
18:20 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweith. Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4632785

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811
St. Athanasius Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751
Amman International Church Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweith. Tel. 5920146
The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331
The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

ment of Meteorology
Relative cold weather conditions will prevail. Skies partly cloudy with a chance of scattered showers in the northern and central parts of the Kingdom and winds northerly moderate to active. In Aqaba, skies will be partly cloudy, winds northerly moderate and seas calm.

Min/Max. temp.
Amman05/13
Aqaba10/19
Deserts04/16
Jordan Valley10/20

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 15 Aqaba 30. Humidity readings: Amman 55 per cent, Aqaba 55 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:
Ajloun12/04
Jerash05/16
Um Qays05/16
Madaba04/14
Petra06/15
Dead Sea10/20

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Depart-

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Bassam Karadshah. 4389200
Dr. Fakhri Tayeh. 4915880
Dr. Salman Daboudi. 5812568
Dr. Ramzi Mazzawi. 4894788

AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy. 5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy. 5537004
Rukn Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:
Dr. Ghazi Ta'ammeh. 021250080
Fou'ad Pharmacy. 021275360

ZARQA:
Dr. Samir Al Lawzi. 0989601
Palestine Pharmacy. 09893562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre. 4637111
Civil Defence Department. 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue. 4630341
Civil Defence Emergency. 199
Rescue Police 192. 4621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade. 4617101
Blood Bank. 4775121
Highway Police. 5343402
Traffic Police. 4896390
Public Security Dept. 4630321
Hotel Complaints. 5605800
Price Complaints. 5661176
Water & Sewage Complaints. 4897467
Amman Municipality Complaints. 787111
Telephone Information (directo-

ry assistance)121
Overseas Calls0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs. 5661101
Jordan Television. 4773111
Radio Jordan. 4774111
Water Authority. 5680100
J. Electricity Authority 5815615
Electric Power Co. 4636381
RJ Flight Information. 44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport. 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery. 5921199
The Islamic. Abdli. 5666131/7
Husseini Medical Centre. 5856856
Luzmila. 4630195
Khalidi Maternity. 4642816
Aldikh Maternity. 4642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity. 4642362
Malhas. J. Amman. 4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani. 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital. 5607431
Jordan Hospital. 5607530
University Hospital. 5353444
Al-Muasher Hospital. 566727/9
Al-Ahli, Abdali. 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen. 4777101/3
Al-Bashir. 4775111/26
Army. Marka. 4891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital. 5157100
Amal Hospital. 5607155
Al Amal Cancer Centre. 5353000

ZARQA:

ZARQA Govt. Hospital (09)983323
ZARQA National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital. (09)866731
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)275555
Roman Catholic Hospital (02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital (02) 7101372, (02) 7103101
Rosary Sisters Hospital (02) 7102831, (02) 7102011
Specialty Hospital (02) 7103100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)201411

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)52700 where it should always be verified. Information on other flights is obtained on telephone (44) 52700 or (44) 523250. Information on Royal Wings flights can

be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
08:30 Damascus (RJ)
09:30 New Delhi (RJ)
09:30 Tehran (RJ)
09:55 Karachi, Dubai (RJ)
10:05 Beirut (RJ)
10:15 Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
10:35 Colombo (RJ)
15:00 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:20 Cairo (RJ)
17:40 London, Berlin (RJ)
19:40 Rome (RJ)
20:55 Frankfurt (RJ)
00:30 Larnaca (RJ)
00:35 Paris (RJ)
06:35 Bangkok, Doha (RJ)

Other Flights
13:05 Vienna (OS)
13:15 Riyadh (SV)
13:20 Abu Dhabi, Doha (GF)
14:05 Rome (AZ)
18:00 Dubai, Damascus (EK)
18:40 Beirut (ME)
19:05 Paris (AF)
19:15 Frankfurt (LH)
21:35 Cairo (MS)
22:55 London, Damascus (BA)
23:35 Amsterdam (KL)
01:00 Belgrade (JU)

Airport) 16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)

Airport) 22:50 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:30 Beirut (RJ)
11:00 Frankfurt (RJ)
11:15 Rome (RJ)
11:30 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
12:00 Brussels, Paris (RJ)
12:00 Geneva, Madrid (RJ)
12:15 London (RJ)
12:30 Cairo (RJ)
20:30 Riyadh, Dhahran (RJ)
20:30 Jeddah (RJ)
21:00 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
21:15 Larnaca (RJ)
21:25 Bombay (RJ)
02:00 Abu Dhabi (RJ)

Other Flights
06:15 Damascus, London (BA)
06:30 Larnaca (CY)
14:15 Abu Dhabi, Bahrain (GF)
14:45 Riyadh (SV)
15:50 Vienna (OS)
19:00 Dubai (EK)
20:00 Beirut (ME)
22:35 Cairo (MS)
00:35 Amsterdam (KL)
02:10 Belgrade (JU)

Royal Wings (RW)
07:00 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)

Prince Hassan prays, lectures at mosque



REGENT GREETING CITIZENS: HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, greets citizens outside the Al Hussein Mosque in downtown Amman following Friday prayers. Also attending prayers were Chief Chamberlain Prince Ra'ed Ben Zeid, Their Royal Highnesses Prince Ali Ben Nayef, His Majesty King Hussein's advisor on Islamic affairs, Prince Abdullah, Prince Faisal, Prince Firas, Islamic Chief Justice Izzeddine Khatib Al Tamimi, Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdul Salam Abbadi. Several senior civil and military officials also attended the prayers.

AMMAN (Petra) — The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Friday organised a seminar on zakat (alms) to the poor in the Muslim world, its economic and social effects on Islamic society and the prospects of an International Zakat Fund.

Muslim scholars gathered at the King Abdullah Mosque emphasised the importance of an International Zakat Fund to achieve real solidarity among Muslim communities and expressed their support of HRH Crown Prince Hassan's earlier call for such a fund to benefit the Islamic World to

confront poverty and unemployment.

Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdul Salam Abbadi said the proposed fund could be utilised to carry out joint economic and social projects and could offer help to Muslim refugees, who now constitute 70 per cent of the total number of refugees around the world.

Prince Hassan, who attended the seminar's final session, urged the Islamic World to shoulder its responsibilities towards securing Muslims right to a decent life. The Crown Prince pointed out that

the international zakat fund could play a role in engendering solidarity among Muslims worldwide.

Underlining the importance of gathering accurate information on Muslims to lay the ground for such a fund, Prince Hassan said that a survey should be conducted to provide information about the condition of Muslim societies and their needs.

The Regent said that Islamic research institutions are responsible for studying the humanitarian side of the Muslim people and must base decisions on a data base and

accurate statistics.

Describing Islamic meetings and seminars as contributing to positive change in the Islamic World, the Regent said that Islam's social and economic order calls for fulfilling Muslims rights to a decent life.

Prince Hassan has urged Muslims worldwide to establish the zakat fund to relieve Muslim victims of natural or man-made disasters as well as to support those facing difficult circumstances. The fund should reflect the true image of the Islamic faith and its message to the world.

Jordan signs JD66 million agreement for dam construction project in the Southern Ghor region

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — The government and a consortium of Greek and Bosnian companies Thursday signed a JD66 million agreement to construct two dams in the Southern Ghor as part of a plan to develop the Jordan Valley.

Minister of Water and Energy Hani Mulki and representatives of Greece's Aegean and Bosnia's Hydrogradnja signed a deal to construct a JD21 million dam in the Wadi Valley and a JD45 million dam in the Mujib Valley.

The two firms agreed to donate a water desalination plant with a 200-cubic-metre-a-day capacity in the Northern Ghor's Karameh area to meet residents' water consumption needs. The plant's cost are not yet determined.

The projects aim to harness 19 million cubic metres (mcm) per year of floodwaters flowing to the targeted valleys and channel it for use at Arab Potash Company and the Dead Sea Chemical Complex. An additional 15 mcm will be exploited by the tourist area along the eastern Dead Sea shores, while another 20 mcm annually will be used to increase agricultural irrigation in 61 dunums in the northern Ghor.

During a signing ceremony, Mulki said the dams will help meet a possible shortage of water in the winter ends with a small

amount of rainfall, and called the current drought situation as "dangerous and worrisome."

An emergency governmental committee working on contingency plans to combat a looming drought is already considering an appeal to international organisations for aid.

The assistant to the secretary general of the Jordan Valley Authority, Thamer Alami, has reported that the volume of water so far collected in the country's dams are well below normal levels for this time of the year.

According to Alami, water levels have dropped as follows: the King Talal Dam has dropped to 32 mcm from 72 mcm, Ziglab Dam to 1.2 mcm from 3.5 mcm and Wadi Arab Dam to 6 mcm from 16 mcm. He said the Wadi Sha'ib and Kafra dams as well as several desert dams are nearly empty.

The ministry recently launched an ongoing crack-down against the abuse of 1,654 privately-run water wells as part of a comprehensive plan to combat the Kingdom's growing water shortage.

The scheme includes linking public and privately-owned wells to the main water network and forcing owners to adhere to a settled quota.

The Wadi Dam, to be constructed within the next 27 months-65 km south of

Amman, will have a 9.3 mcm storage capacity, and the controversial Mujib Dam, to be built within 39 months in the heart of majestic Wadi Mujib, will have a 35 mcm storage capacity.

Thirty per cent of the projects' cost will be covered by the government, while the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development will pay 50 per cent and the Islamic Fund for Development will guarantee 14 per cent, according to the ministry.

Last September, a consortium of international and local companies signed four agreements worth JD6.4 million with the Ministry of Water and Irrigation to supervise and provide architectural services to implement the "Integrated Southern Ghor Development."

The JD180 million project will include constructing dams in the Mujib, Wadi and Hasea Valleys, a diversion dam at the confluence of Mujib and Wadi Valleys, and infrastructure for an irrigation system to water 12,000 dunums of land in the north of Ghor Salt.

The government has started a JD20 million project to develop the infrastructure of the southern Dead Sea area as tourist resort and to provide services and facilities to residents, future hotels and tourist villages in the area.

Six five-star hotels and resorts, including the Marriott

and Mövenpick hotels, are under construction. Saudi Arabia's Prince Al Waleed Bin Talal also has plans to invest in a tourist village. Mulki has said he expects some JD200 million to be invested in the area.

The government has allocated JD15 million to ensure that such projects do not contradict environmental protection in the Jordan Valley.

Last fall, the government and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature agreed to construct the controversial Mujib Dam, in the heart of the Mujib Reserve where one of Jordan's cleanest and least disturbed river systems left, according to an environmentally-friendly scheme to ensure water extraction and develop ecotourism in the reserve.

Jordan relies mainly on rain-water to meet domestic, agricultural and industrial needs which are tapped from surface water sources, such as rivers, and renewable groundwater sources.

According to an official report, the Kingdom's fresh-water resources will be fully utilised by the year 2005. Official statistics suggest that by the year 2000, Jordan's population, growing at around 3.5 per cent per year, will require 1,257 mcm of water to cover the country's minimum water needs, while resources will be capable of supplying only 960 mcm.

Princess Basma takes Ramadan campaign south

WADI ARABA (Petra) — Her Royal Highness Princess Basma spent Wednesday and Thursday inspecting 16 villages in the Agaba governorate as part of the Ramadan Charity Campaign organised by the Queen Alia Fund for Social Development (QAF).

The Princess distributed in-kind aid to 1,550 needy families and presented 400 gifts to orphaned children and needy students.

Princess Basma, QAF's president, announced a donation of JD 12,000 to a women's group in the Disi region to help them establish a bakery.

While visiting village of Qar, the princess

announced another donation of three hundred palm tree saplings and an irrigation system for the trees. The trees will be maintained by 30 village residents who have undergone a training course in planting and nurturing palm trees.

The planting of palm trees in the village is part of a national effort to plant trees for their date fruits which will be a source of income for the local communities in southern regions of Jordan.

In Bir Madkour of the Wadi Araba region, Princess Basma listened to a briefing by local officials on the health problems of local children and instructed

the concerned QAF department to conduct a field survey to pave the ground for an integrated programme to deal with the problems.

In Rahme, Princess Basma met QAF workers involved in the distribution of in-kind and financial assistance to residents and visited a number of homes and donated wheelchairs to handicapped persons.

She observed the work of health workers who offer voluntary services to residents through a QAF-sponsored clinic.

In Aqaba, the Princess joined orphans at an iftar organised by the Ports Corporation and distributed

gifts to children for the 'Eid Al Fitr feast. She also presented medical equipment and wheelchairs to a number of handicapped children.

Her visit to Aqaba included an inspection tour of several homes in Shallaleh. She also called at the QAF-sponsored social development centre where she was briefed by the centre's Director Sulaim Tawha on services and the residents who benefit from the centre.

Accompanying the Princess were Aqaba Governor Abdul Karim Malaheh and a number of Aqaba region officials.

Survey examines religious authorities' attitudes towards contraception, family planning

Hind-Lara Mango

AMMAN — A survey on the attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge of religious leaders of family planning found that over 82 per cent of religious leaders think family planning is permissible according to Islamic principles, while four per cent considered it undesirable, and ten per cent were uncertain.

The survey, conducted by the National Population Commission (NPC), is the first of its kind in the region. It is hoped that it will help the commission formulate a more aggressive population strategy for a country whose socio-economic resources are being put under severe pressure.

With a population of 4.2 million and a population growth of 3.5 per cent, experts project that the Kingdom's economy must grow by six per cent annually to accommodate this population growth, but in all likelihood, the Kingdom would not be able to achieve such a vigorous growth rate to strike equilibrium. GDP this year is estimated only at one to two per cent.

According to the study, religious scholars favoured more traditional contraceptive methods, such as the rhythm method and the use of the IUD. But they showed considerable uncertainty towards sanctioning specific modern contraceptive methods such as injectables and Norplant as they knew little about them. "Jordan has a high contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR)," said Nabeh Salameh, secretary general of the NPC. "Thirty-seven per cent of married women between the ages of 15 and 49 use modern contraceptive methods, while 52 per cent use more traditional methods."

Times that the NPC sought to gain a thorough understanding of religious leaders' understanding of family planning, attitudes and teachings because they are influential in forming opinions, decisions and actions of Jordanians.

The survey canvassed

statistics indicate a drop in the country's fertility rate from 4.4 children per married woman to 3.9 this year.

Sociologists prefer that tough economic conditions have led couples today tend to favour smaller families. This, they say, is privately echoed in the sentiments of

ning methods had spousal communication," said Alfred Yassa, chief of the Near East Division at the Centre for Communication Programmes at the Johns Hopkins University.

According to the 1996 study, men still maintain a preference for male children and large families, and it was found that religion played a large part in decisions.

The five-year communication strategy is now focusing on a family planning campaign emphasising spousal communication, the equal value of male and female child, modern family planning methods, and a better quality of life.

"An interwoven theme in this campaign is that Islam sanctions family planning, modern contraceptives, fosters spousal communication, and endorses equal treatment for girls and boys," Yassa told the Jordan Times.

The 1997 survey on religious leaders, showed that registered mild disagreement with the idea that it is important to have at least one son.

Experts strongly felt that family planning contributed to a better quality of life from the psychological, health and social perspectives, and they believed that the concordance of Islamic tenets with family planning and the use of specific methods of contraception must be more widely disseminated.

During the course of this year workshops and programmes will be set out based on the final results of this survey.

"It is vital that religious scholars speak out about this issue to help us implement our national population strategy," Salameh said.

1,594 male and 61 female Islamic religious leaders who represent 91 per cent of the 1,810 religious leaders employed by the government.

Approximately 36 per cent of those questioned had lectured on family planning during the year prior to the study. It was found that the youngest age group of religious leaders was the least likely to have spoken about the subject, while the oldest group was the most likely.

"Education is significantly and positively associated with preaching about family planning," Salameh said. Experts believe that Jordan, known to have the highest fertility rate in the region, but recent studies have revealed a steady decline in fertility rate. Sta-

religious leaders. In a male-dominated society, where most decisions, including those of family planning, are taken by men, religious scholars felt that family planning should be a joint decision.

"Ninety per cent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that decisions regarding family planning should be made jointly by husband and wife," Salameh disclosed.

Earlier research conducted in the country by the NPC and the Maryland-based Johns Hopkins University, revealed a correlation between family planning and spousal communication.

"Research has shown us that 86 per cent of those who are using family plan-

Cultural scene pundits row with Ministry of Culture over 'exclusion' from Arab Capital of Culture planning activities

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — Jordanian artists, intellectuals and writers have attacked the Ministry of Culture for excluding them from preliminary preparations to revamp Amman as the Arab Capital of Culture by the year 2002.

They say Minister of Culture Talal Hassan had excluded them from a ministry committee he formed recently to prepare a plan of action for the event.

But Hassan has rejected the charges and said a higher committee soon will be formed to supervise preparations in coordination with private cultural associations and institutions.

"The Ministry of Culture believes that every writer and intellectual in Jordan has the right to participate in cultural development," Hassan said.

The ministry is unable to "monopolise" cultural

activities because it supports such activities alone and because it believes that culture is a shared fortune, said Hassan.

The committee earlier formed by the ministry is not the final committee," he said. "Its mission is to prepare a working paper to form recommendations, and later there will be a workshop in which all parties will participate," he said.

The row was triggered by Fakhri Kwar, head of the Jordanian Writers Association, who accused Hassan of taking a unilateral decision in forming the ministry's committee.

"The culture ministry believes that it is the only legitimate representative of Arab culture in Jordan and believes that it is the leader of cultural activities in the country," said Kwar.

"Hence, it unilaterally formed the preparatory committee and ignored other concerned parties," he

said. The writer cast doubt on the ministry's ability to successfully prepare Amman as the capital of Arab culture.

Another writer described the ministry's move as premature and rash.

"Preparing Amman for such an important event requires the participation of talented individuals with established reputations throughout the Arab World," said Mufid Nahleh, a columnist at Al Ra'i's Arabic daily. He called on the ministry to cancel the preparatory committee and form a "higher national committee" comprised of representatives from different cultural institutions as well as other artists and writers associations.

However, artists remained divided whether Amman deserved the nomination by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on grounds it

has a "limited cultural movement which lacked government support."

Adnan Madanat, from the prestigious Abdul Hamid Shoman Foundation, said Jordan lacks the fundamental infrastructure for such an important event.

"We do not have theatres, and the country's theatre is underdeveloped," he said. "Jordan also does not have cinema production. Jordan is only at the beginning of the road."

Ghassan Mashini, an artist, said, "It is very fair that Amman was selected to be the capital of Arab culture, but this capital [Amman] lacks the government's support and care."

Amman was selected as the Capital of Arab Culture at a meeting for the Arab Ministers of Culture in the United Arab Emirates. The other selected capitals to secure the title include Beirut in 1999, Riyadh in the year 2000 and Kuwait in 2001.

Cabinet may reverse decision on phone company

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The Council of Ministers is studying the possibility of charging Jordan's two public phone companies fees for occupying public space, an Amman Municipality official said Friday.

The government's decision came after the Amman Municipality questioned the legality of a decision by the government in 1996 to exempt the companies — TransJordan for Telecommunications (Alo) and Jordan Public Payphone Services (JPP) — from paying the fees.

The official, who requested anonymity, said the Cabinet is expected to cancel the three-year-old exemption "soon."

According to the official, Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh is expected to meet Amman Mayor Nidal Hadid and officials from the municipality's legal department to discuss the matter.

However, another senior official, who also requested anonymity, said the exemption was offered as an incentive to attract investment in the vital telecommunications sector and that the government should respect its previous decision not to charge

those two companies.

Minister of Post and Telecommunications Suleiman Hafez denied knowledge of any pending decision which would, according to the city source, would be announced after the upcoming 'Eid Al Fitr.

The municipality official said the Amman Municipality will contest the legality of that exemption — taken by the Cabinet of former Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabarid — at the Higher Court of Justice if the meeting with Tarawneh fails to result in a cancellation of the exemption.

The municipality's legal department determined after a study last week, that the Cabinet legally does not have the right to issue such an exemption on behalf of the Amman Municipality.

"According to the municipality's internal regulations, the Council of Ministers does not have the right to issue such an exemption," said Mohammad Subehi, head of the legal department.

According to the Municipality Law, he said, the municipality has the right to collect retroactive charges from both JPP and Alo! for installing public phones on a state-owned property.

The dispute over the land-

usage fees was triggered earlier last year when a Lower House deputy called on the government to explain its decision and the legal bases on which the exemption was granted.

"How is it that private-run companies were exempt from paying fees for using public land?" asked Deputy Nazih Ammari in an interview with the Jordan Times. "People do not have the right to use state land without paying for it."

According to Ammari, the two companies occupy around 3,000 square metres of public land.

The Amman Municipality

annually charges JD50 for one square metre. Each phone booth covers an area of one square metre.

However, Financial Director of Alo! Ahmad Dawleh told the Jordan Times that his company will have to increase the price of its service if the municipality decides to charge it for occupying public property. JPP officials declined to comment on the issue.

Alo! has 2,586 phones installed across the Kingdom. The company, established in 1997, hopes to install an additional 7,000 phone booths by the end of 1999.

WHAT'S GOING ON

RELIGIOUS SERVICES

• Special Christian religious service to give thanks for His Majesty King Hussein's recovery and imminent return home at St. John the Baptist Church, De La Salle College, Jabal Al Hussein at 6:30 p.m. (Tel. 5661757).

EXHIBITIONS

• Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.

• The Warm Winter — works by several artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1.

• The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2), until Jan. 28.

52 Hindu pilgrims killed in Indian hilltop shrine collapse

TRIVANDRUM, India (AFP) — At least 52 Hindu devotees were killed and more than 50 injured when a hill at a pilgrimage site in the southern Indian state of Kerala caved in beneath them, witnesses said Friday.

Forty-one of the injured were described as being in a critical condition. The dead included three women and six children.

The disaster occurred at about 7:00 p.m. Thursday (1330 GMT) as pilgrims massed to view a "celestial light" at the Sabarimala hilltop shrine in Pathanamthitta district, more than 200 kilometres north of the state capital Trivandrum.

An estimated 1.5 million barefoot Hindu pilgrims, all dressed in black — were gathered around the site when the disaster occurred.

The vast majority were male, with females barred from the site except for pre-pubescent girls and post-menopausal women.

According to several witnesses, a partial collapse of the 18-metre hill triggered a stampede which caused a larger section to cave in.

"First, a small boy fell off when a portion of the hill gave way about five metres from the top. Then everybody panicked," one witness said.

Police said there were at least 10,000 people on the hillside when the accident occurred. The majority of pilgrims were from Andhra Pradesh and the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Most of the victims were either trampled to death or buried in the collapse, although witnesses said many were killed when they grabbed hold of a high-voltage electricity wire to try to break their fall.

Some fell as far as 12 metres to their deaths. Police and firefighters headed the rescue, digging out those who had been buried in the collapse and ferrying the injured to hospital.

"The pilgrims were helping out as best they could and at least 100 people were rescued from the pile of mud," another witness said.

The tragedy occurred as the pilgrims were jostling for a vantage point to watch a "celestial light" believed to appear in the sky at dusk on certain holy days.

Police said many of the pilgrims had taken up places on the hill two days before. "They refused to get off the hill and the numbers just kept on increasing," one officer said.

Press reports said the breaking of a restraining rope was partly to blame for the stampede. Police said 25 people died on the spot while 27 others died of injuries in hospital.

The temple trust announced a compensation of 10,000 rupees (\$238) to the families of each of the victims killed.

Indian President, K.R. Narayanan, who was born in Kerala, expressed "shock and grief" at the disaster, while Prime Minister Atal

Behari Vajpayee conveyed his "heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families."

Thursday's gathering was the culmination of a two-month long pilgrimage to the Sabarimala shrine.

The pilgrims were carrying miniature models of the Sabarimala temple made of reed and decorated with candles and oil lamps that would later be set afloat on a nearby river.

"Usually one or two Sabarimala pilgrims die every year from illness or exhaustion," said one state official.

"This is the first time in more than five decades that a tragedy of this scale has happened. We have ordered a probe but the shrine will remain open for another four days."

A police spokesman said the toll was bound to rise, given the condition of some of the injured.

Indian pilgrimage sites, often located in isolated, inaccessible areas, have exerted a heavy death toll over the years, often as the result of ill-prepared devotees ignoring official warnings.

In 1996 more than 200 pilgrims died when they were caught in a blizzard en route to the sacred Amarnath cave site in the northern state of Kashmir.

In August last year, 60 pilgrims were among more than 200 people who died when a landslide buried an entire mountain village in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.



A relative of a hill collapse victim tries to identify bodies with help of a policeman at Pathanamthitta hospital. At least 52 people were killed after the 60-foot hill partially collapsed in southern Indian Kerala state during an annual Hindu pilgrimage (Reuters photo)

Congo peace efforts flounder once more

LUSAKA (R) — A planned summit of African leaders in Zambia to bring peace to war-torn Democratic Republic of the Congo floundered again Friday after a no-show by Congolese President Laurent Kabila and rebel forces.

Zambian President Frederick Chiluba said the meeting, which was scheduled for Saturday, had been postponed to allow regional defence and foreign ministers time to draft a framework document that could be presented to heads of state.

Prospects for Saturday's summit dimmed after attempts by Chiluba to broker face-to-face talks between Congolese President Laurent Kabila and rebel leaders in the Zambian capital Lusaka faltered.

Congo state radio said Friday Kabila refused to meet representatives of the rebel group, the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), unless they came to Kinshasa.

Kabila repeated this position when he met Chiluba in Lubumbashi, in southern Congo, Thursday, the radio said.

"I should admit that I was over ambitious," the government-owned Times of Zambia quoted Chiluba as saying after returning to Zambia from a

meeting with Kabila in the Congolese city of Lubumbashi Thursday.

Regional defence and foreign ministers already in Lusaka said they would hold closed-door talks in the Zambian capital over the next two or three days.

"We came to an understanding that the ministers should first thrash out a document that has the consensus of all the parties and then the prime ministers can come and ratify it," said Tanzanian Foreign Minister Jakaya Kikwete.

"On that basis we agreed it would be premature to get the presidents to meet now. The summit will be called only once they have finished their talks and agreed," Kikwete said.

Ministerial talks, including officials from the 14-nation Southern African Development Community (SADC), Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations were scheduled to start at 3 p.m. (1300 GMT).

Kabila's Foreign Minister Jean-Charles Akoto was due to attend the talks but no representatives from the rebel RCD had arrived in Lusaka.

Kabila — who is backed by forces from Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia and Chad — has refused to recognise the umbrella rebel group as a legiti-

mate political and military force, but has offered to meet the rebels in his capital Kinshasa.

In Namibia's capital Windhoek, a government official said Kabila and his allies would meet on Sunday to plot a way ahead.

Regional heavyweights, particularly South Africa, have made rebel participation a condition of its involvement in the planned summit, which has already been postponed twice.

Chiluba had been spearheading attempts to broker direct talks between Kabila and the rebel RCD, which is backed by Uganda and Rwanda, to end the six-month-old war.

Forces of RCD leader Ernest Wamba dia Wamba control key towns and cities in the east of the vast, mineral-rich former Zaire, including Kisangani.

"We want broader consultation. We want to allow the officials already meeting here to work all round until after Sunday. Then I can call for the summit," the Times of Zambia quoted Chiluba as saying.

Libya's foreign minister is also in Lusaka following on from talks last month between Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi and dia Wamba and also with Uganda President Yoweri Museveni.

Pakistani man jailed for sex with Anwar to be released

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — A Pakistani man jailed for having sex with sacked Malaysian Deputy Premier Anwar Ibrahim will be released next week, his lawyers said Friday.

Munawar Ahmad Anees will be freed Monday, two months before the end of his six-month jail sentence, said his defence counsel Balwant Singh Sidhu.

But another man accused of having sex with Anwar had a request to get his passport back rejected.

"Munawar gets one third remission from his sentence for good behaviour, so he effectively only serves four months," Balwant told AFP, adding he would still pursue an appeal against conviction.

"My client will definitely want to proceed with his appeal case. He wants to clear his name," he said.

Munawar, an Islamic scholar who has written speeches for Anwar, is married to an Algerian woman and has two children with French nationality.

Balwant said Munawar was still being detained at a hospital

psychiatric ward as "he needed some attention," but declined to give details.

Munawar was first admitted to hospital after he suffered a heart attack following his conviction. He was later transferred to the psychiatric ward and has remained in hospital.

Munawar and Anwar's adopted brother, Sukma Darmawan, are appealing their six-month sentences, which were handed down for sodomy in separate trials on Sept. 19, a day before Anwar himself was arrested.

Both alleged police forced them to confess they were sodomised by Anwar, now on trial on four corruption charges. Sukma was released on bail last month pending his appeal.

But Sukma's application for the return of his confiscated passport to enable him to go back to Indonesia to celebrate the Muslim holiday next week with his family was rejected Friday by a high court.

Justice Abdul Wahab Patil was quoted as saying by the official Bernama news agency that Sukma had been convicted and yet to complete his jail term

following his bail.

"It will set a precedence if I allow this application," the judge said. Sukma just smiled when he was approached by reporters, Bernama added.

It was unclear when Sukma will complete his jail term. His lawyers were not available for comment.

Anwar's corruption trial was adjourned Thursday until Jan. 26, following a new ruling striking all sexual evidence from his court record.

The order was issued after state prosecutors amended charges against Anwar so they would not have to prove accusations that he engaged in homosexual acts or had an affair, in a bid to seek a conviction.

Malaysian opposition leaders have slammed the move and called for the charges to be dropped.

Anwar, 51, was sacked on Sept. 2 and arrested 18 days later after he led a massive rally against Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. He now faces 10 corruption and sodomy charges.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Yeltsin draws criticism from Moscow mayor

MOSCOW (AP) — Boris Yeltsin has yet to make an appearance in the Kremlin this year, and Moscow's powerful mayor Friday sharply criticised the Russian president and accused him of failing to fulfil his duties. "Russia, as a presidential republic, should have an active president," Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov said. "We are having problems today." Luzhkov was a Yeltsin supporter for years, but he has begun openly criticising the Russian leader, who has been sidelined by illnesses in recent months and has said almost nothing about the country's economic crisis, which hit five months ago. "If the role of the head of state weakens, this affects the economy and government affairs," Luzhkov said. He made his remarks to Swedish television in advance of a visit to Sweden, and his comments were reported by Russian news agencies. Russia celebrates several holidays at the beginning of the year, and many businesses and government offices are closed for days at a time. Still, Yeltsin had planned Kremlin meetings for Thursday and Friday, but abruptly cancelled them and remained at his Gorky-9 residence outside the capital. Yeltsin remained at his residence Friday and spoke by telephone with the presidents of France and Finland. Yeltsin's aides say the president is in good health and is working daily at Gorky-9, a secluded, wooded retreat. Yeltsin spoke with French President Jacques Chirac to discuss details of his planned visit to France on Jan. 28, the Interfax news agency said. The trip will be Yeltsin's first journey abroad since October, when he cut short a visit to Central Asia because of illness. He was later hospitalised for two weeks with pneumonia. Yeltsin also spoke with Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, and the Russian leader said he planned to visit Finland at some point this year, the Interfax news agency reported. Yeltsin, 67, has insisted he will serve out his term, which lasts until the middle of 2000.

British minister asks for meeting with Germany on nuclear power

LONDON (AFP) — Britain's industry minister has called for an urgent meeting with German Environment Minister Juergen Trittin over Germany's decision to cancel lucrative contracts in nuclear fuel reprocessing, officials said Friday. Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers has asked for the meeting "as a matter of emergency," a spokesman said. The British government is backing protests from the company British Nuclear Fuels at Germany's decision to end the reprocessing contracts as part of its plan to phase out nuclear power. "It is clear that there are binding contracts between U.K. and German companies and letters between U.K. and German governments containing commitments which we expect to be honoured," he said. "We have been in touch both at official and ministerial levels and have made this position clear." Germany's decision has also angered France, where officials predict the loss of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in revenue for their fuel reprocessing industry. A spokesman for British Nuclear Fuels, which operates the Sellafield reprocessing plant in northwest England, confirmed that it was seeking compensation for the breaking of the £1.2 billion worth of contracts. The contracts represent 10 per cent of the Sellafield reprocessing facility's business. About 600 tonnes of German nuclear waste are at Sellafield, with only 56 tonnes so far reprocessed.

Rugova backs meeting of all Kosovo political forces in Vienna

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia (AFP) — Kosovo Albanian moderate political leader Ibrahim Rugova expressed support Friday for a meeting of "all political forces" of Kosovo Albanians as planned by the OSCE in Vienna. "We are working towards the organisation and holding in Vienna of a gathering of all political forces and institutions in Kosovo," Rugova told reporters here. "I am always ready. I am the president of Kosovo and my doors are always open. We are preparing for such a meeting of all political forces and institutions in Kosovo in order to prepare for possible negotiations with Belgrade," Rugova said. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) chairman Kurt Vollebæk said in Vienna Thursday that formation of a "joint platform" of rival Kosovo Albanian group was a priority. He indicated that the OSCE was ready to organise a meeting between rival Kosovo political leaders in Vienna "as soon as possible."

Hand grenade thrown into elementary school

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — A hand grenade was thrown into an elementary school Friday injuring several students, police said. The injuries were not believed to be serious, they said. No one took immediate responsibility for the attack in neighbouring Rawalpindi, some 10 kilometres outside the federal capital of Islamabad. No one has been arrested and so far police say they have no suspects. In recent weeks there have been increasing incidents of violence in Pakistan's populous Punjab province. Last week in a small village in the heart of the Punjab province 16 Shiite Muslims were killed when gunmen walked into a mosque in which they were praying and opened fire. Two weeks ago a bomb shattered a bridge over which Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his family were to cross. Four people were killed, including a police officer who was assisting with the security arrangements for the prime minister. There is no evidence that the attacks are related, but the Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, brother of the prime minister's, has said that he will step up security. Already additional police patrol large mosques in most cities and towns of Punjab.

Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski dies at 65

ROME (AFP) — Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, one of the most important influences on contemporary European theatre, has died at his home in Italy aged 65, the Italian news agency ANSA reported Friday. Grotowski died Thursday at Pontedera, between Pisa and Florence. Pontedera made him an honorary citizen in 1986. His career as a director began in 1957 at the Stary Theatre in the city of Krakow, southern Poland, where he later joined the teaching staff at the national academy of dramatic arts. In 1965 he moved to Wrocław in south-west Poland where he founded his own Institute for Research into Acting Methods and theatre laboratory. Grotowski believed in what he called "poor theatre" — an expression used in the title of one of his books, published in 1968. This laid emphasis on the importance of direct communication between the actor and the audience. Although professionally attached to Wrocław for the next 17 years, he went to London in 1966 to work with the Royal Shakespeare Company. The following year saw him in New York, and from 1968 to 1970 he was professor at the French higher academy of dramatic arts at Aix en Provence. He left Poland in 1982, initially to live in France, before settling in Italy three years later. His many productions included *Fanston* (1963), *Hamlet* (1964) and *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* (1968) for which he received the New York Drama Desk Award.

Cambodian royalist party merges with former resistance partner

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — Cambodia's royalist FUNCINPEC and its former partner in resistance to strongman Hun Sen, the Soa Sann Party, merged Friday in a bid to strengthen their positions.

The low-key "welcoming ceremony" took place at the FUNCINPEC's party office in Phnom Penh.

"We do this, but it does not mean that we are forming a front to fight anyone," FUNCINPEC chairman Prince Norodom Ranariddh said.

"I have to make it clear to the national and international opinion that we merge in order to reconstruct the royalist and pluralist democratic system," he added, saying the merger was planned "a long time ago."

Prince Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC is now in coalition with Hun Sen's

ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP), after spending years fighting it alongside the forces of the Soa Sann Party and the Khmer Rouge.

The Soa Sann Party is the latest incarnation of the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (PLDP), one of Cambodia's oldest political forces which over the years has espoused nationalism, anti-communism and republicanism.

Son Sann, who during the 1980s fought Hun Sen's pro-Vietnam regime in alliance with Prince Ranariddh and the Khmer Rouge following Vietnam's invasion in late 1978, retired from politics last year aged 87.

"The reason we are merging with FUNCINPEC is that we want to regroup and strengthen our human resources, particularly the democratic and nationalist

vote," a senior leader of the Soa Sann Party told AFP Thursday.

FUNCINPEC won 45 parliamentary seats in last July's election, against 62 for the CPP.

The election was the first held since the violent collapse of an uneasy power-sharing deal between Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen in July 1997 which resulted from the historic U.N.-brokered polls of 1993.

The PLDP woo 10 seats in the 1993 election but, following a split in 1995, failed to secure any seats in last year's poll. Military conflict in Cambodia has died down with FUNCINPEC and the CPP burying the hatchet and with the collapse of the brutal Khmer Rouge, blamed for the deaths of up to two million Cambodians during the 1970s.

Cambodia plans to cut armed forces, police by third

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Hoping to attract more than \$1 billion in foreign aid, the Cambodian government announced plans Friday to slash the ranks of the police and military by a more than a third.

The government will present a plan to demobilise 55,000 soldiers and 24,000 police officers over the next five years at a Feb. 25-26 meeting of major donors in Tokyo.

Cambodia's bloated civil service and military has been a major gripe of international donors, who will be asked by the government to give \$1.3 billion in aid over the next three years.

Although Cambodia is enjoying peace for the first time in decades, military spending in recent years has steadily increased with the integration of thousands of Khmer Rouge guerrillas into the army.

The military now stands at 148,000 soldiers and the various police forces have about 64,000 officers, according to government estimates.

Police spokesman Khieu Sopheak said Friday that the payroll for the police and military has become unmanageable. Salaries for November and December have not been paid, and without a substantial increase in revenue, the shortfall is expected to continue.

"These two armed forces spend a lot of money," Khieu Sopheak said. "But now that we are enjoying a peace of almost 100 per cent, we want to shift this money to social welfare."

Cutting military spending and increasing budgets for health, education and rural development is a repeated request from donors that have accounted for as much as half of Cambodia's budget in past years.

Assistance was drastically cut in 1997 after Hun Sen seized sole power in a violent coup, but a July election and the formation of a new government have paved the way for a return of desperately needed aid.

Hun Sen will also ask King Norodom Sihanouk to allow him to step down as commander in chief of the armed forces to silence criticism that the military is controlled by the ruling party, Peon Thol said.

The military split along political lines during the coup, and reintegration efforts have hit several snags since Hun Sen struck a coalition deal with his former rival, Prince Norodom Ranariddh.

Hun Sen's army has accused forces loyal to the prince of allowing Khmer Rouge guerrillas to mix with their ranks to boost the strength of the royalist faction, an accusation denied by Ranariddh's generals.



U.S. Secretary of Defence William Cohen (right) and his South Korean counterpart Chenn Yong-Tae inspect a South Korean honour guard during a welcoming ceremony in Seoul. Cohen is in Seoul to attend the annual Security Committee Meeting which focuses on tensions over North Korea's suspected nuclear arms ambitions (Reuters photo)

U.S. offers Seoul 'nuclear umbrella' against attack from North

SEOUL (AFP) — U.S. and South Korean defence chiefs called on North Korea Friday to halt its long-range missile programme, warning that the North could face nuclear retaliation should it launch attacks on the South.

South Korean Defence Minister Chun Yong-Tae linked rumours of a looming crisis with the North this spring to fears that Pyongyang would launch another of its long-range Taepo-dong missiles.

Such a launch "would indeed undermine stability on the Korean peninsula," Chun said at a news conference here with U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen.

The United States is ready to provide a "nuclear umbrella" for South Korea if it is attacked by the North, the joint statement said, amid worries both about Pyongyang's missile programme and its suspected nuclear ambitions.

"Secretary Cohen reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to render prompt and effective assistance to the ROK (South Korea) for repelling any armed attack ... and provide a nuclear umbrella for the ROK," it said.

Chun said he and Cohen discussed "military-diplomatic countermeasures" to any missile launch and suspicions about an underground site in the North that Washington believes may harbour a secret nuclear complex.

Cohen reiterated comments he made in Japan earlier this week that he did not discuss a military option for dealing with North Korea. However, in their joint statement, the defence ministers said they discussed early deployment of U.S. reinforcements in the event of a crisis and deterrence against any North Korean attack which used chemical and biological weapons or missiles.

Cohen and Chun said they were worried that North Korea, "despite profound economic difficulties, continues to develop and produce not only conventional weapons but also ballistic missiles and chemical and biological weapons."

"They once again confirmed that the use of inhumane weaponry such as chemical and biological weapons would not be tolerated in any situation," Cohen and Chun outlined a strategy of deterrence and dialogue with North Korea, including continued four-party peace talks involving China, the United States and the two Koreas.

"We will maintain a strong deterrence as we pursue dialogue with North Korea," Cohen said.

Washington is pressing for access to the underground site at Kumchangri, which it suspects may be in violation of the 1994 Agreed Framework, which froze North Korea's nuclear programme.

It is our hope that the North will see fit to reduce the tensions, to resist the temptations to launch more Taepo-dong missiles, and to create any instability in the region," Cohen said.

North Korea's Aug. 31 launch of a three-stage rocket over Japan stunned the region because it showed a dramatic improvement in the Stalinist nation's ability to strike over long distances.

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Primakov warns Siberian chiefs not to let Russia disintegrate

MOSCOW (AFP) — Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov urged Siberian governors Friday to put aside their separatist ambitions, warning that he would not allow Russia to split up like the Soviet Union did, Russian news agencies reported.

Primakov stressed that separatist tendencies, which have burgeoned in Russia since last year's economic crisis, "must be silenced, eradicated and destroyed," Interfax reported.

"We lost the Soviet Union," Primakov reminded the 19 governors of Siberian regions, gathered in the coal-mining city of Kemerovo for a regional pow-wow. "We will not allow Russia to be lost."

Since becoming prime minister four months ago, Primakov has repeatedly warned of the dangers of Russia disintegrating. He told parliament as he was voted in as premier on Sept. 11 that his prime task would be to stop the country falling apart.

Siberian governors, keen to bypass Moscow in matters of trade and investment and furious with the centre's repeated failure to distribute budget dues on time, have made increasingly independent noises of late.

Krasnoyarsk governor Alexander Lebed warned

Wednesday that he would push for "redistribution of relations between the centre and regions" at Friday's meeting in Kemerovo.

"The principle of running all things from Moscow is still prevalent in Russia," Lebed was quoted by ITAR-TASS as saying. "The Federation has been increasingly shifting more responsibilities to regions without backing them financially."

Moscow has signalled in recent days that it is ready to keep its side of the bargain and transfer budget funds promptly. Deputy Finance Minister Viktor Khristenko said earlier this that January's regional dole-out would be completed ahead of time.

He added that regions would get an extra 3.5 billion rubles (\$16 million) this year due to cuts in spending on the state apparatus, ITAR-TASS reported.

It is not just in Siberia that Moscow has struggled to contain centrifugal forces. Late last year the southern republic of Kalmykia indicated that it was tired of paying dues to Moscow and wanted independence.

Khristenko said that Kalmykia would not get any funds from the federal budget until it paid its own debts to the centre, which amount to 236 million rubles (\$10.7 million).

U.N. agencies seek truce, aid corridor in Sierra Leone

GENEVA (R) — U.N. agencies called Friday for a quick ceasefire in Sierra Leone and security guarantees for a humanitarian corridor to bring in food and medicine to tens of thousands of civilians whose lives are in danger.

The World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the U.N. refugee agency expressed concern about the condition of hundreds of thousands of civilians trapped by fighting between government forces and rebels in Freetown.

U.N. agencies evacuated their foreign staff from the former British colony for security reasons in early January. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) — the last humanitarian agency

deploying expatriates in Freetown — pulled out its last five delegates Wednesday at government request.

Rebels were retreating from Freetown Friday, Rebel commander Sami Bockarie said they had accepted an unconditional, seven-day ceasefire but said it could not start until Monday so as to allow time to inform all his guerrillas in the bush.

"The situation is very serious. The WFP launches an appeal to the parties of the conflict to accept a ceasefire and guarantee the necessary security conditions for humanitarian organisations to have rapid access to distressed populations in Freetown and inland," WFP spokeswoman Christiane Berthiaume told a news briefing in Geneva.

"Tens of thousands of

lives are in danger," she added. "We must react rapidly if we are to avoid a catastrophe." Civilians in Freetown have been without fresh food, water and electricity for more than 10 days. "There is hunger and surely already malnutrition," Berthiaume said.

The Rome-based agency has 63 local employees still in place, but it is not sure about the state of the more than 2,000 tonnes of food it had stored in warehouses in the capital, she added.

"We could distribute food immediately, tomorrow, if we have a humanitarian corridor and security guarantees. Our local staff can reach people," the spokeswoman said.

Patrick McCormick, UNICEF spokesman, said that an estimated

one million people in Freetown had been confined by the fighting and many had run out of water and food.

"We are appealing to stop the fighting. It would be the first step to begin to end this ridiculous war," he said.

Kris Janowski, spokesman for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said that local staff in areas of Freetown held by the West African intervention forces ECOMOG had reported that the civilian population was "traumatised."

"We don't have any reports from rebel-controlled areas," Janowski added. "We don't know the extent of loss of life." Only 567 Sierra Leone refugees have registered so far in neighbouring Guinea, according to the Geneva-based UNHCR.

De Klerk blasts Mandela in autobiography

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — South Africa's last apartheid president F.W. de Klerk blasts President Nelson Mandela in sections of his forthcoming autobiography, according to excerpts in the press here Friday.

De Klerk's book reveals how the two men, who in 1993 jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize for their contribution to peace in South Africa, had a long-running feud over their respective places in history, reported the Mail and Guardian.

Describing his first meeting with Mandela in 1989 when the then-prisoner was smuggled into his Cape Town residence, de Klerk writes: "During most of the meeting, each of us cautiously sized up the other."

The first impressions that he conveyed were of dignity, courtesy and self-confidence. He also had the ability to radiate unusual warmth and charm — when he so chose.

He said that on

Mandela's release a year later, he "failed completely to rise to the occasion" when he delivered his first speech to a rally in Cape Town which was "evidently drafted by hardline ideologues" and pledged the ANC to armed struggle.

The Codesa peace talks, designed to effect peaceful transformation from apartheid to democracy, degenerated, into bitter recriminations between the two men.

De Klerk fumes at Mandela for what he describes as "one of the most vicious personal attacks on a political opponent that most of those present at Codesa had ever heard."

"He accused me of being the head of an illegitimate discredited minority regime and of being incapable of upholding moral standards," writes de Klerk.

"As he piled insult on insult I found it difficult to control my fury. My first

reaction ... was to walk to the microphone and rip off the ANC's mask in the strongest possible verbal counterattack."

Fortunately, he says, "Mandela spoke long enough to give me time to regain control of myself" and "national interest demanded I should transcend my own ego."

Of Mandela's handshake when Codesa adjourned for Christmas, De Klerk writes: "I accepted Mandela's gesture as gracefully as I could, but felt that there was no longer any possibility of our ever again having a close relationship."

"The fact remained that Mandela's vicious and unwarranted attack created a rift between us that never again fully healed."

The Nobel Prize ceremony provided further alienation, according to de Klerk, who criticised Mandela for attacking him in interviews he gave to the media before de Klerk's

arrival for the Oslo prize-giving.

"Apparently he was not pleased with the decision to include me in the award," said de Klerk, who retired from politics in 1997.

The book, "The Last Trek: A New Beginning," also reveals de Klerk's and his then-wife Marike's chagrin at Mandela over occupancy of the presidential residence when de Klerk had lost the presidency to Mandela in 1994.

Mandela told de Klerk that as co-deputy president he could remain in Libenas, but later told him he was under great pressure from the ANC to move in there himself as that was seen to be the home of the head of government.

"The final humiliation that I had to endure" was when Mandela insisted on personally inspecting Overaal, the residence eventually chosen for the de Klerks, to see if refurbishment was necessary, as they had claimed.



'JEEPS' ON ALERT — A Yugoslav army tank observes the road leading from Pristina to the village of Podujevo, northern KLA stronghold of the Kosovo region, some 28 km from Pristina. The Serb army is still keeping their position throughout the provincial capital of Pristina, after being deployed here to combat the ethnic Albanian 'terrorism'. International observers reported tank fire Friday in southern Kosovo in an area where Yugoslav troops were said to be hunting down insurgents. "We have reports about tank fire in the area of Suva Reka. We are trying to investigate that," said spokesman Sandy Blyth of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Suva Reka lies about 45 kilometres south-west of the provincial capital Pristina. The Serb-run Information centre reported that Yugoslav security forces had launched an operation against "members of a terrorist group" of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) just to the north of Suva Reka. Police units had blocked the village of Racak, 20 kilometres north of Suva Reka "in order to arrest members of this terrorist group that last Sunday attacked a police patrol, killing one policeman, Svetislav Prizic," the centre said. It added, quoting the police sources that the group was responsible for numerous attacks in the region of Urosvac, east of Suva Reka, in which seven Albanians were killed. The verification mission was "informed of the measures taken by the police," the centre added. The OSCE has invited Kosovo Albanian faction leaders to Vienna to hammer out a 'common platform' for negotiations with Belgrade over the troubled province (AFP photo)

Shoot starts on DiCaprio movie

PHI PHI ISLAND. (AFP) — Leonardo DiCaprio started shooting his new movie on an idyllic Thai island Friday as residents angrily accused filmmakers of destroying a beach where the film is set.

DiCaprio, star of multi-Oscar winning "Titanic" waved to a flotilla of media boats as he stepped off a large luxury catamaran to begin the shoot.

Location shots are being filmed on Maya Bay beach in Phi Phi Island national park where glorious white sands are framed by turquoise waters and a natural amphitheatre

stone cliffs.

Phi Phi residents meanwhile met to discuss how to rebound from two failed legal challenges against the film, "The Beach."

"Leo (DiCaprio) is getting rich by ruining Maya Bay — please stop it the local people have no Leo fever," said local lawyer Piserpong Somruwat.

Residents say they may stage a protest against the movie Saturday and have yet to decide whether to try for the third time to get an injunction to stop the shoot.

Phrakob Tularak, a councillor in local Krabi province said the fight should go on to eject producers 20th Century Fox

from the island.

"If the courts of Thailand cannot help us we will take it to the courts of the world," he said.

"We are going to fight it through every means at our disposal."

Opponents of the movie charge that landscaping to turn the beach into Hollywood's idea of a paradise island will fracture the beach's ecosystem.

Coconut palm trees have been planted on the sands and critics claim dunes have been landscaped and indigenous plants removed by Fox.

Fox and government officials say there will be no lasting environmental

damage when the film crew packs up and goes home.

A police launch and around a dozen long-tailed boats guarded the entrance to Maya Bay Friday to keep media crews and spectators from disturbing filming.

The row over the film has been brewing for months and has involved protests, sit-ins and a letter campaign in Thai newspapers.

"The Beach," based on Alex Garland's cult novel of the same name, tells the story of a traveller whose infatuation with Thailand leads him to a remote island inhabited by a community of displaced Westerners.

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Better ways to celebrate

THE IMPATIENCE with which we all are awaiting the moment when His Majesty King Hussein will finally return home grew with HRH Crown Prince Hassan's announcement on Thursday that the King will bring back with him major decisions on policies related to the land, water, energy and agriculture.

But, after the euphoria — and, why not, curiosity — raised in many of us by the Regent's anticipation, we should stop for a moment to ponder on what we all, as citizens, residents, or simply guests of this land do every day to preserve its resources for the generations to come.

The dreadful figures on the scarcity of our water resources demand that we all act responsibly in our every-day life. If we intend to leave to our children something more than a bank account.

1998 was not generous, at least in terms of rainfall. Levels of precipitation plummeted to historic lows even for this arid region. And, still, leaks due to the remaining worn-out water pipes of Amman municipality and irresponsible behaviour by some continue to flood many streets.

No matter how desperate the situation is, many of us still seem to believe they have the sacred right to wash their cars every day. It is time we all realise that, if it is true that money can buy almost anything, it cannot buy what is not there, and the days when water will not be there, easily available for all, are nearing.

There is a lot the authorities could do to help this nearly criminal waste. A good start could be the establishment of 24-hour hot-lines that citizens could call to report leaks or other problems to the network, so that maintenance teams could swiftly move to address the situation.

Since our water situation has all the characteristics of a chronic emergency, it would help greatly if the authorities started to address it as such. Seeing that officials regard it as an emergency, citizens would also be more aware and sensitive to the problem. Maybe some shopkeepers would even stop washing the sidewalks in front of their stores.

Great changes start with even small actions. It would greatly help, for example, if, before going to the supermarket, each of us could remember to bring plastic bags from home, in order to reuse them instead of getting new ones.

Furthermore, to remain in the field of public conscience, and as the Regent stressed also on Thursday, there is no need for firing weapons or racing cars to celebrate the King's return. Such behaviour, as Prince Hassan said, can only bring tragedies on a happy occasion.

What could be more improper than immature and irresponsible conduct to greet a man whose historic mission and dimension greatly transcend this country, and who is coming back home after a courageous personal battle?

Let's act with awareness, responsibility, and dignity.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Kheirallah Kheirallah said there is no doubt that Iraq is currently registering points against the U.S. as it has lost its credibility with its policy on Baghdad. It is clear that the superpower wants to continue the sanctions on the country as long as its regime is still in place, and there is no indication that the U.S. will change its policies against Iraq to end the crisis, Kheirallah added. This has prompted France to provide suggestions for a solution, because, it said, according to the writer, it is not possible to continue such policies, especially after the failure of the Desert Fox Operation. Practically, the U.S. strikes have strengthened the Iraqi regime while at the same time increased the Iraqi people's suffering — a factor that some Arab countries cannot stand for, for internal reasons, said the writer. Now, thanks to the Iraqi regime's recent statements, the country might not be able to benefit from these few positive outcomes of the strikes and, has instead given the U.S. a chance to turn around its failure, claimed Kheirallah. If Iraq wants to get rid of the sanctions, it should abandon such statements, especially towards its neighbours and the U.N., and learn some lessons, said the writer, who added that it is not enough to register points against the U.S., flexible policies are also required.

Al Dustour's Yasser Za'atreh said a recent meeting of the Palestinian National Authority's Legislative Council has ended with the prohibition of political detention and the immediate release for all those who have been detained by the security forces for political reasons. This is not the first and will not be the last meeting of the council on this issue, thanks to the tireless efforts of the detainees' families, said Za'atreh. The irony is that the political detainees are the country's best men, who gave their lives to the Palestinian struggle while in Zionist jails, said the writer and added that most of them were detained without charge. They were imprisoned just to satisfy the U.S. Israel's alleged security needs and to ensure the implementation of the Wye River Accord, which has been frozen by Israel, said Za'atreh. The writer called on the Palestinian people to end what he called a "real tragedy."

Ross visit will achieve no meaningful progress

U.S. TROUBLESHOOTER in the Middle East, Dennis Ross, is in the region now, but he is unlikely to produce any breakthroughs, given that the key to unlocking the Israeli-Palestinian peace process seems to have been thrown away last month when Israel decided to go for early elections. From our vantage point here, no meaningful progress in the peace process is likely in the next six months: that is the time it takes for the elections to be held and a government to be installed in Israel.

As such, we cannot hope for realistic negotiations on the final status of the West Bank and Gaza to begin, let alone conclude, by the May 4, 1999 deadline set under the Oslo agreements. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat may or may not make good his "threat" to declare an independent Palestinian state on May 4, but the very talk of doing so is setting back prospects of any interim movement on the ground.

Obviously, the U.S. is hoping that Ross might be able to talk Israel into implementing the measures it undertook in the Wye agreement regardless of the spanner thrown in the works by the

announcement of elections. Notwithstanding any Israeli contention, the government of Benjamin Netanyahu should remain committed to carrying out the next phase of Israeli withdrawal from parts of the West Bank as specified in the Wye accord. At least that is how it should be under ideal circumstances, where everyone stands by commitments.

But the situation in the Middle East has never been ideal, and indeed the U.S. bears a major share of the responsibility for that. Again, that is neither here, nor there.

What concerns U.S. most is the peace process being held hostage to Israeli politics. Indeed, it is not the first time that the process is frozen by internal Israeli considerations, but we believe that it should not be repeated this time around.

Israel has undertaken certain commitments and it should implement them, elections or no elections. Similarly, the U.S. administration should not remain hostage to considerations over U.S. President Bill Clinton's predicament in Congress. Clinton may or may not be ousted from office by

the Senate, but he should not pencil in any Senate votes on the basis of his actions vis-a-vis Israel.

It goes without saying that the international community also expects Palestinian leader Arafat to live up to his commitments. And so far Arafat has performed well, despite the odds stacked against him by hard-line groups which see no point in negotiating with Israel under the present lopsided balance of power in the region.

There have been hiccups off and on, but then they cannot be blamed solely on Arafat, who has done more than his part and put his political future at risk by cracking down on his own people — something that Netanyahu failed to do apparently because, in his view, it would have damaged his political standing in the Israeli electorate, particularly among the extremist settler community.

By extension, fear of incurring political damage at home has also been behind Clinton's hesitation to take a firm stand and demand Israeli compliance with its commitments.

We see little prospect of any significant change in the situation

Jordanian Perspective



Dr. Musa Keilani

today. If anything, even token actions in the context of implementing the Wye agreement could be seen as political statements in Israel today. Against that background, it is very difficult to expect the ongoing Ross mission to produce anything positive for the Palestinians, who are indeed the aggrieved party in the equation.

That said, there is the real danger of Netanyahu using the opportunity to further water down the provisions in the Wye agreement without actually renegotiating

with the Palestinians. He could use Ross to suggest additional Palestinian compromises, which he could use as evidence in his campaign to win votes as a hard bargainer who whittled down Israeli commitments in an already signed and sealed document. That could be in the form of reducing the scope of withdrawal from the West Bank in the next — but overdue — phase of the Wye accord. We hope it will not happen. It is becoming increasingly clear that the physical control of territory at any given point in time is likely to be the main factor that will decide the shape of the Palestinian state in the making.

Even a hawk like Ariel Sharon has signalled that a Palestinian state is the logical outcome of the process. But Israelis like Netanyahu, Sharon and others not only want to determine the shape of that state but also its policy at all levels. And, regardless of what Ross is trying to accomplish, the focus of the battle from now on will be upon the physical size of a Palestinian entity in the West Bank and Gaza and what the Palestinians living in that entity can and cannot do.



And you thought demons were dead

FOR MILLENNIA mankind dreads of summoning demons to the mortal realm. These immortal beings sprung from the depths of hell could, practitioners of the dark arts believed, offer their human masters untold powers, but for a price, as the good Dr. Faust might testify. While most people today would relegate the belief in demons to the dustbin of ignorance and superstition, oddly enough it is only now that such entities, malevolent, immortal and powerful beyond human conception, are able to walk the earth and take their place among humanity. And ironically, science and knowledge, which erased the widespread belief in the traditional hell-spawn, are responsible for the strength and growing power of the new demon: the corporation.

It sounds weird, I'll admit. Corporations as demons? How can the profit-making organisations that provide us with refreshing carbonated beverages, 100% non-mad cow beef hamburgers, and smokeable carcinogenic products be bad or supernatural? But look a little closer and the comparison begins to seem less ludicrous. On several aspects, the demon-corporation model surpasses even the most imaginative mage's wildest dreams of sources of power.

A human being born in the United States will live, on average, about 72 years. A corporation, not subject to the traditional things that tend to kill off people, like bad health, traffic accidents, and disgruntled civil servants with guns, can exist for

centuries, all the while enjoying a legal status very similar to that of a regular person. And unlike a human, where loss of important bodily functions usually spells the end, every part is replaceable. Kill one leading corporate executive, or a hundred. There will be a thousand waiting to assume the vacant positions, to access the banks of corporate memory, to keep the entity alive. It is a living system in which a brilliant component (i.e., person) may strengthen the whole, but an incompetent component will not, except in very rare circumstances, destroy it. The immortals are among us.

The way these entities are spending all of this time, however, is more disturbing than their extreme longevity. A look at some recent activities can help shed some light on the goals of the corporations, whose motives are anything but pure. One example is a global fast food franchise, which shall remain unnamed in an effort to cut down on free advertising, that is currently engaged in a battle to silence two activists who have questioned the giant's policies. With the power and wealth that this organisation wields, almost any group or person that dares to hold an opinion that does not conform to what it promotes as truth is liable to lengthy and costly legal action. The time has come for John Q. Public to choose between hamburgers on demand or freedom of thought and speech.

Other trends are even more ominous. What happens, for instance, when a major corpo-

Out of Order



Brian Brown

lives could be saved. The ancient urge to summon and control demons was all about power, control over other people. Despite any misgivings over the corporations, companies, and conglomerates, I have to hand it to the Waltons, Rockefellers, Gates and Watsons of the world. They've managed to bring into existence what the conjurers and magicians of old could never have.

RECOMMENDED READING: *Neuromancer*, by William Gibson. Though somewhat dated, as works of science fiction tend to become as new technology becomes available, the premise of *Neuromancer* is still plausible and grabs the reader. The plot revolves around a young hacker who is rescued from a path of self-destruction in order to pull off the biggest heist of his career. Gibson's future, which largely centres around the Matrix, somewhat like a bleak landscape of ecological disaster where money rules everything.

Iraq commands column inches

Compiled by
 Mohammed Ben Hussein

Columnists last week discussed the Iraq crisis and the proposal by Saudi Arabia to end the sanctions.

Al Dustour's Jihad Momani criticised the countries that called for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, and which claimed that toppling Saddam is the only solution for the Iraqi people's suffering. He said that if those countries were convinced that such a thing would benefit Iraq, then Saddam himself would be happy to leave his post and give a chance to others. But would Israel abide by United Nations resolutions and withdraw from Arab occupied land, if Saddam left, asked the writer, and would the American troops leave the Gulf? The writer doubted that Saddam is the only obstacle blocking peace in the region. If Benjamin Netanyahu or the United States says Palestinian President Yasser Arafat should be removed, Momani asked, will we also listen to them?

Al Arab Al Yawm's Saleh Qallab said the Iraq crisis is not between Iraq and the chief of UNSCOM, Richard Butler or with Rolf Ekeus, or France, Russia, Britain and the Arab Gulf countries; it is with the United States. The American administration is now withholding Iraq's file and does not wait for a green light from the United Nation or anywhere else in the world to strike Iraq, said the writer. There is no channel of negotiations between Iraq and the U.S., said the writer, force is the only language of dialogue between them. Different countries first accused Ekeus of being an American spy and the reason for the crises with the U.N. and then the blame was laid at Butler's door, said Qallab. The writer charged that the problem is not with Ekeus nor with Butler, but with the United States' policy vis-a-vis Iraq which goes as far back as the Iraq-Iran war.

Al Dustour's Orib Rintawi commented on the Saudi proposal to end the eight-year sanctions imposed on Iraq, and said that the Iraqi refusal was rash and premature; this was an offer Iraq should have accepted. It is true that intensive efforts by the Arab Gulf countries and other countries such as Egypt and Syria to find a proper formula in order to save the Iraqi people from its plight, at the same time to create a confrontation between the Iraqi people and its leadership, said the paper. And when Saudi Arabia made its proposal — which entails that the sanctions are lifted but the military embargo remains — it was not made without consultations with its Arab Gulf brothers in Egypt and Syria. But if Iraq had accepted this proposal, it would have paved the way for the end of sanctions, and would have contributed to holding the long-overdue Arab ministerial meeting which is supposed to discuss the Iraq stand-off with the United States.

Al Ra'i's Mahmoud Rimawi commented on the Saudi proposal to end the sanctions imposed on Iraq saying such a proposal is very important since it is the first time that a proposal includes what should remain under embargo and what should be permitted. The proposal is easily implemented and meets Iraq's basic demands, said the writer. It does not exclude oil and also allows flights to travel to and from Iraq, which makes the sanctions much milder than those imposed on Libya, said Rimawi. The writer expected that the proposal, which will be discussed during the Arab foreign ministers meeting on Jan. 24, will not be rejected by any Arab country including the Arab Gulf states. But more importantly than making such a proposal is its implementation, said Rimawi. He said the proposal will not be accepted by the U.S. or any other Western country and the Arabs have to unilaterally implement it, he added.

U.S. intellectuals call for action against Iraq sanctions

By Noam Chomsky, Edward Herman, Edward Said, and Howard Zinn

AT THE END of 1998, the United States once again aimed bombs on the people of Iraq. But even when the bombs stop falling, the U.S. war against the people of Iraq continues through the economic sanctions. This is a call to action to end the war through sanctions.

This month U.S. policy will kill 4,500 children under the age of 5 in Iraq, according to U.N. studies, just as it did last month and the month before that, all the way back to 1991. Since the end of the Gulf War, at least hundreds of thousands — maybe more than 1 million — Iraqis have died as a direct result of the U.N. sanctions on Iraq,

which are a direct result of U.S. policy.

This is not foreign policy — it is sanctioned mass-murder that is nearing holocaust proportions. If we remain silent, we are condoning a genocide that is being perpetrated in the name of peace in the Middle East, a mass slaughter that is being perpetrated in our name.

The time has come for a call to action to people of conscience. We are past the point where silence is passive consent — when a crime reaches these proportions, silence is complicity. There are several tasks ahead of us.

First, we must organise and make this issue a priority, just as Americans organised to stop the war in Vietnam, and to protest U.S. policies in Central America and South Africa. We need a national campaign to lift the sanctions.

This kind of work has already begun, and those efforts need our help. For the past several years, individuals and groups have been delivering medicine and other supplies to Iraq in defiance of the U.S. blockade. Now, members of one of those groups, Voices in the Wilderness in Chicago, have been threatened with massive fines by the federal government for "exportation of donated goods, including medical supplies and toys, to Iraq absent specific prior authorisation." Our government is hamstringing a peace group that takes medicine and toys to dying children; we owe these courageous activists our support.

Such a campaign is not equivalent to support for the regime of Saddam Hussein. To oppose the sanctions is to support the Iraqi people. The people are suffering because of the actions of both the Iraqi and U.S. gov-

ernments, but our moral responsibility lies here in the United States, to counter the hypocrisy and inhumanity of our leaders.

Also, there has been a virtual embargo on news of the effects of the sanctions in the mainstream media. For the most part, the American people do not know what evil is being carried out in our name. We must continue to apply pressure on journalists at all levels — from our local papers to the network news — to cover this tragedy. We should overwhelm the major press with letters to the editor and put pressure on journalists to cover the story.

And we must realise this could be a long struggle. Preparations should begin for all the possible strategies, including civil disobedience once a sufficient number of people are committed. Direct action that forces a moral accounting likely is going to be

necessary. Whatever else we are doing, we should treat this as an emergency and put it at the top of our agenda. Existing groups can work on the issue, new groups may need to be formed, and national networks need to be built. A good central source of information exists on the web at <http://leeb.net/IAC/>.

Without action by us, the horrors will go on, the children will continue to die. We must appeal to the natural sympathies of the American people, who will respond if they know what is happening. We must therefore bring this issue, in every way we can, to national attention. The only way to avoid complicity in this crime is to do everything we can, and much more than we have been doing, to end the sanctions on Iraq. This issue must be discussed in every town hall and every public forum across the country.

Colombia rebels map out plan to topple government

By Karl Penhaul
Reuters

COLOMBIA'S LEADING guerrilla force is not letting peace talks stand in the way of its "strategic plan" — to topple the government by force, rebel commanders say.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has grown from a hit-and-run Marxist guerrilla unit into a fully fledged "people's army" and boasts it now has the power to attack large military bases and medium-sized provincial capitals.

The tough talk in a Reuters interview this month with the FARC's "second generation" — fighters now in their 30s who have grown up in rebel ranks — is the clearest sign yet that they are pursuing a twin-track policy to seize national power.

The rebels aim to win political space, along with national and international recognition, through peace talks with President Andres Pastrana's administration while simultaneously laying plans for a first, devastating nationwide offensive.

"We have a strategic plan in which we have set out the details for a nationwide offensive. We know how many men we would need and

how many millions of dollars it would cost to carry it out," rebel commander Marco Aurelio Buendia, leader of one of the FARC's elite mobile combat units, said.

"The plan is designed in stages and once we have all the technical means and conditions we would launch the first offensive," he added, cradling a high-powered assault rifle during an interview at an isolated farmhouse outside the handsomely furnished town of San Vicente.

Pastrana has pulled all government security forces out of an area around San Vicente the size of Switzerland to allow the FARC to take part in the peace talks, officially launched on Jan. 7, without fear of attack.

Buendia declined to spell out how much the first offensive would cost, citing security concerns, but he estimated the guerrillas would need "somewhat more than 30,000 men."

Colombian and U.S. officials estimate the FARC currently has a fighting force of some 15,000. But a rebel source, who did not wish to be named, put the figure at "around 25,000" including rural-based guerrillas and urban militias.

Together with the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN), Colombia's guerrillas are estimated to have de facto control of up to half the

country. The long-running civil conflict has left more than 35,000 people dead in the last 10 years alone and forced more than a million peasants to abandon their homes for fear of getting caught in the crossfire.

The FARC, formed as a pro-Soviet force in 1964, set out to transform itself into a "people's army" at its 1982 Seventh Conference. A surprise attack by government security forces in 1990 on guerrilla headquarters, known as Casa Verde, steered the rebels' resolve to step up military capacity sharply.

The largest insurgent force in the hemisphere, it has more than 60 fronts divided into seven separate fighting divisions, called Bloques, spread across the country. It also has crack mobile combat units that move around the country, sometimes in specially chartered aircraft, to launch high-profile attacks.

Such mobile units took part in the battle in El Bilar, in southern Cauca province, last March in which more than 80 soldiers were killed — the worst single defeat inflicted on the military in the history of the 30-year-old war.

They saw action again in early August in Miraflores, in southeast Guaviare province, where they reduced a U.S.-sponsored anti-drug base to rubble and killed more than 40 security force members.

"At this moment we could take Villavicencio or Florencia or a similar medium-sized city. But that's not a threat because at the moment we're talking peace," FARC military mastermind Jorge Briceño, alias "Mono Jojoy," said in a rare public appearance recently. He was surrounded by more than 1,000 rebel fighters weighed down with a deadly array of weaponry on a hillside overlooking San Vicente.

U.S. defence officials say the FARC has become so powerful after a string of devastating strikes on the armed forces over the last two years that it now poses a threat to the stability of the entire region. They warn that the group could seize power by force within five years if it is not held in check.

"When the United States says the Colombian army has not got the capacity to fight us it is a pretext to give them more support and resources. We're able to combat the army but cannot put a time limit on how long it would take to defeat them," a rebel chief said whose nom de guerre is Román told Reuters.

Román shot to fame early last year when he kidnapped four U.S. birdwatchers in mountainous Bogotá and threatened to kill them if they proved to be undercover intelligence agents.

He later released them unharmed.

For tactical reasons the FARC refuses to say

when it may be ready to launch its offensive. It also will not say if it will wait for peace talks to break down before it strikes.

In addition to preparing rural-based units, the FARC is working to boost the combat readiness of its urban militias — until now largely involved in fund-raising and logistical operations — in a bid to bring the war from the countryside into the cities.

"We're working a great deal with grassroots movements and the urban militias across the country. ... We're taking giant steps forward," said Gentil, a rebel leader of humble peasant origins whose rose through the ranks and was at the forefront of last year's attack on the Miraflores base.

The declared aim of the FARC's strategic plan is to seize national power and set up a socialist government of "peasants, workers and Indians." Key policy aims include sweeping agrarian reform, radical wealth redistribution and an end to free market economic policies in favour of a more protectionist system.

"When the first offensive comes we aim to knock the army senseless but we are well aware that many of us will fall in the battle," said one urban militia leader, who did not wish to be named.

Even the brave think twice now about Yemen

By Mohammad Sudam
Reuters

YEMEN'S BLOSSOMING tourist trade has been hard hit by the recent killings of foreigners, with industry officials reporting cancellations across the board.

Last month's deaths have put off even the more intrepid travellers who go to the land once ruled by the Queen of Sheba for attractions like the tomb of Job and the world's oldest skyscrapers.

"We are seeing a decline in the number of foreign tourists coming here, and some of them are now leaving prematurely after the latest kidnappings," an official at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism told Reuters.

Three Britons and an Australian died during a rescue bid by Yemeni security forces on December 29. A Briton and an American were injured. They were among 16 Western tourists taken hostage by Islamists.

The deaths were the first in six years of kidnappings in the poverty-stricken Arab state, where more than 100 foreigners have been abducted by disgruntled tribesmen, but freed safely later.

One industry official said some cruise ships that were due to sail through Yemen had cancelled, while a hotel manager in Sanaa said the only book-

ings he had at the moment were from foreigners coming to Yemen on business trips.

One travel agency estimated that it had lost around 80 per cent of its business in the wake of the killings.

The ministry official said 82,270 foreign tourists had visited Yemen in 1998 in comparison to 80,451 in 1997. These were mostly French and Germans, he added.

He said foreign tourists spent a total of \$84 million in 1998 as well as some 11.7 million rials (\$830,000 at the current exchange rate of 141 Yemeni rials to the dollar).

Industry sources say about half a million Yemeni families are financially supported by drivers, guides and hotel staff in the tourism sector of a country whose only other source of income is its relatively small oil production.

Yemen is rich in archaeological sites, but outside the capital Sanaa most of these are in rugged areas that can only be reached by four wheel drive cars travelling along unpaved roads and through remote tribal villages.

The tourists who were killed had begun their holiday in Sanaa and had travelled east to Marib, the ancient site of the Queen of Sheba's legendary home.

They had then carried on east across

the Rub Al Khali desert and Hadramaut Valley where narrow houses made of seven storeys of sunbaked mud bricks have been dubbed the world's first skyscrapers.

They were skirting the Indian Ocean on their way to Aden when they were captured.

"We are looking into ways of reinforcing security measures to protect foreign tourists and at the same time we are campaigning to make Yemenis more aware of how important tourism is to us," the ministry official said.

Hotel managers and travel agents said they hoped the tourism industry would see a revival in 2000.

But clouds are still gathering on the horizon.

An Afghan veteran living in Britain said on Wednesday that militants in Yemen might resort to killing foreigners outright without abducting them first if one of the alleged kidnappers was executed for the murder of the Western tourists.

Yemeni authorities have charged Zein Al Abideen Al Mchdar, also known as Abu Al Hassan, and two other Yemenis with kidnap and premeditated murder for the killings. The detainees face a possible death sentence.

King to address Jordanians tonight ahead of Tuesday return

(Continued from page 1)

The Royal Court has received requests for brief visits from Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Sultan of Brunei, Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan Haji Hassanah Bolkiah.

Other countries have requested to send senior officials to represent their governments.

"The King's arrival is going to be a Jordanian feast like never before," one official told the Jordan Times referring to preparations under way for the event.

According to a draft programme made available to the Jordan Times, the King is expected to pilot his own aircraft to Marka Airport.

King Hussein, accompanied by Her Majesty Queen Noor, will be greeted by Royal family members, government ministers, senators, deputies, Arab and foreign ambassadors, tribal leaders and dignitaries.

His motorcade will pass through downtown Amman, Jabal Amman and straight to his new home in

Hummar, near Amman.

Over a million people lined the streets of Amman to welcome the King back home after he underwent surgery in 1992 to remove a kidney found to have cancerous cells.

Officials expect a similar if not larger turnout as King Hussein's return coincides with the four-day national "Eid holiday."

Most Jordanians have known no other Monarch than King Hussein, who represents Jordan's stable position in the Middle East. The King celebrated 46 years on the Throne last Aug. 11.

Praising God for the King's recovery and imminent return to Jordan, special religious services have been conducted at different churches and mosques around the Kingdom. Jordanian Muslim women held on Thursday a special afternoon prayers at various mosques in the Kingdom, while on Sunday, churches will conduct services for the King's recovery.

As for the Information Ministry, it has been busy during the last few weeks receiving requests from hundreds of leading television networks, newspapers and news agencies and try-

ing to facilitate their coverage of the Jordanian people's meeting with their leader. It was reported that CNN and other TV stations might carry the moment live.

The ministry has also prepared for live coverage of the Kingdom's celebrations, which are expected to last for more than a day.

On Thursday, the Press and Publications Department announced that any journalist seeking to cover the King's arrival should contact the Jordan Press Office, located at the Inter-Continental Hotel, in order to obtain a special permit before Tuesday.

As for the Education Ministry, it was reported that each ministry school will have its own programme for celebrating the King's return.

Associations and the private sector will mark the King's arrival in their own fashion. Some associations have decided to give their employees bonuses on their salaries.

Meanwhile, commercial banks in Jordan announced that they intend to allocate JD5 million over the next five years to establish "Al Hussein Fund for Creativity."

Several restaurants and charitable societies in Jordan decided to visit hospitals and orphanages and offer presents to children on the occasion of the King's recovery and safe return home.

Last Wednesday, Prince Ra'd Ben Zaid, the Chief Chamberlain, received at the Royal Court a group of Israeli children who presented him with letters and cards for the King, with wishes of good health and congratulations on his safe return.

Officials said the Kingdom has received through a special children's television programme more than 3,600 letters addressed to King Hussein expressing love, respect and good wishes.

Adding to the celebratory spirit, several Arab singers will perform in Jordan.

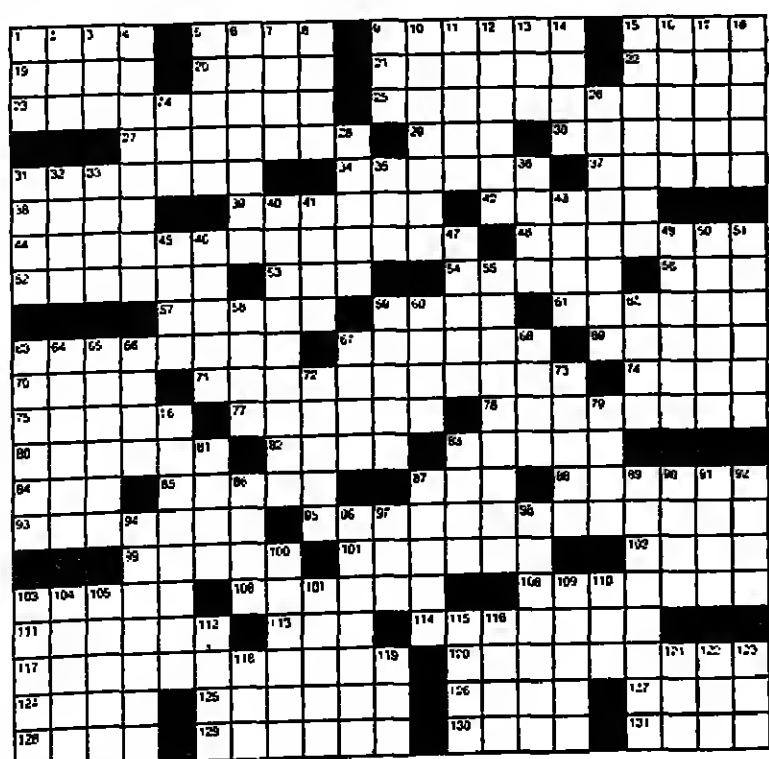
Fairuz, the famous Lebanese diva, will hold two concerts in Amman on Jan. 28 and 29 at Amman Private University to celebrate the recovery and homecoming of King Hussein.

The Saturday Crossword

STEPHEN KINK?
By Witty A. Wiseman, New York, New York

- ACROSS
- 1 Rock females
 - 3 Adam's grandson
 - 9 Bony
 - 15 18th-century
 - 19 Stress Markian
 - 20 Dressed
 - 21 Hall of "Our House"
 - 22 Fall low
 - 23 Last stretch of an S.K. marathon?
 - 25 S.K.'s tribute to runway models?
 - 27 Mid-ocean
 - 29 Kipling book
 - 30 Beemarches
 - 31 Bush or Bomer
 - 34 Of the nose
 - 37 Wellands
 - 38 S-shaped molding
 - 39 Sportsstar Bob
 - 42 Passover meal
 - 44 S.K.'s philosophical
 - 46 S.K.'s crazy cartoon?
 - 52 Legendary golfer
 - 53 Byron
 - 54 Unlaid speed
 - 56 Avir
 - 57 Took on cargo
 - 61 Hand-led fly
 - 63 Ring within the iris
 - 64 Hornbrained
 - 67 Coercion
 - 69 Wading bird
 - 70 Child's
 - 71 S.K.'s simian
 - 74 Toward shelter
 - 75 Oriental
 - 76 Nursemaids
 - 77 Sports venues
 - 78 Kitchan
 - 79 S.K.'s learned
 - 80 Close a purse
 - 82 Grace ending
 - 83 Threallike
 - 84 Straddle: Brit.
 - 85 Wisting turn
 - 86 Hand grip
 - 87 Last of pay?
 - 88 1988 winner of two goat majors
 - 89 S.K.'s learned
 - 90 S.K.'s easy western?
 - 91 Egyptian weight
 - 101 Stop
 - 102 By ... of (using

- DOWN
- 1 Easter item
 - 2 Open hostilities
 - 3 Holiday lead-in
 - 4 Garden
 - 5 Gantry
 - 6 Writer V.S.
 - 7 Lubricates
 - 8 Dundee dagger
 - 9 G.I. wear
 - 10 Inspiration for "Robinson Crusoe"
 - 11 Related product
 - 12 Swellings
 - 13 Genesis craft
 - 14 Ayres and Wallace
 - 15 Ready to listen
 - 16 Capital of Senegal
 - 17 States forcefully
 - 18 Grating
 - 24 New Zealand bird
 - 26 Instruments for measuring current
 - 28 "Catch-22" star
 - 31 Beethoven's birthplace
 - 32 Film critic James
 - 33 Virginia dance
 - 35 Coop layer
 - 36 Birds' display
 - 40 Extras
 - 41 African nation
 - 43 Computer input
 - 45 People
 - 46 Not likely
 - 47 Scolding woman
 - 48 French star
 - 50 Olney classic
 - 51 Brings joy



Last Sunday's Crossword Solved

- 55 German shepherds
- 58 Qatar's capital
- 59 Chinese cuisine
- 60 Work units
- 62 Stale: Fr.
- 63 Wine choice
- 64 Improck snow
- 65 1982 Wimbledon winner
- 66 Maic or Mindy
- 67 Accomplished
- 68 Mess maker
- 72 Tim and idy
- 73 John Paul II, ...
- 76 Picnic contest
- 78 18-wheeler
- 81 Snared one's case
- 83 Chimney passage
- 86 God of war
- 87 Made-up monsters
- 89 Approved
- 90 Related by blood
- 91 Kidneys: prel.
- 92 Ionian Sea gulf
- 94 Vulnerably
- 96 Snood
- 97 Sea eagle
- 98 Music systems
- 100 Japanese battle cry
- 103 German artist
- 104 Plant house
- 105 Ballpark
- 107 Nirmes
- 109 Editorial directives
- 110 Shatner novel "Power"
- 112 Right on maps
- 115 1250 In letters
- 116 End of a book?
- 118 Dawn lemm layer
- 119 Code base
- 121 Coloration
- 122 Hockey great
- 123 Took fire!

Iraq spurns compromise, demands end to sanctions

(Continued from page 1)

The French proposals are under discussion by the United Nations Security Council.

"We note they have not been rejected, but that does not imply approval," she added.

When questioned about Iraqi comments which were interpreted as threats against Kuwait, she called them "unacceptable."

Russia, a traditional friend of Baghdad, on Friday suggested the abolition of UNSCOM, the U.N. special commission in charge of Iraqi disarmament, and setting up in its place a looser arms control body under tight supervision of the Security Council.

In a paper submitted to the Security Council, Moscow proposed placing UNSCOM's disarmament functions in a new monitoring centre in New York with an office in Baghdad that would be controlled directly by a new committee of all council members.

UNSCOM — charged with the destruction of Iraq's arsenal of chemical and biological weapons — has lost credibility in the face of persistent reports

of intelligence-gathering on behalf of U.S. and Israeli espionage agencies.

After December's air strikes, Baghdad made it clear that UNSCOM's return would not be welcome.

"The use of force by the United States and the United Kingdom against Iraq resulted in actual termination of UNSCOM activities," the Russian paper said.

Independent analysts tended to agree.

"They [Washington and London] want to get rid of the Iraqi government, they are open to accusations that they used UNSCOM intelligence for that aim, and they oppose the lifting of sanctions. I don't see what incentive that gives Iraq to let the inspectors back in, nor how it can be reconciled with the compromise solutions being offered by the French," said Rosemary Holliis, head of the Middle East programme at Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs.

Iraq is currently allowed to sell \$5.25 billion of crude oil every six months to buy essential supplies under a programme to ease the impact of sanctions.

But it is only able to sell about \$3 billion over that period because of its dilapidated oil industry and low oil prices.

Iraq's ambassador to the United Nations, Nizar Hamdoun, said that for that reason the U.S. proposal was meaningless. "It is a cover-up for their entire Iraq policy," he told Reuters.

U.N. reports say Iraq cannot raise its export level until 2000 because of the state of its pipelines and oil fields. Iraq is exporting about two million barrels per day compared with about 3.2 million before the 1991 Gulf War.

In Washington, the U.S. government offered Friday to remove curbs on imports of spare parts for Iraq's oil industry in another concession designed to help boost delivery of food and medicine to the Iraqi people.

State Department spokesman James P. Rubin said the United States would withdraw the hold it places on such equipment in the U.N. sanctions committee.

He stressed the action applied only to spare parts that would help Iraq export

more oil under the U.N. oil-for-food programme.

"We are going the extra mile to ensure we do all we can to improve the plight of the Iraqi people," Rubin said.

Iraq, however, insists any solution to the crisis over disarmament must include the complete lifting of trade sanctions and compensation for damage of repeated Western attacks.

It has spurned all compromise, turned with fury on its Arab neighbours for failing to give it support in its feud with Western powers and repeatedly challenged no-fly zones imposed over northern and southern Iraq by firing missiles at U.S. and British air patrols.

"We have entered an intensified propaganda war in which the prize is Arab public opinion," one Arab ambassador said.

"The United States was starting to look isolated so it has made a tactical shift, but its policy is unchanged."

Economic slowdown hits oil demand prospects

LONDON (R) — Global economic slowdown will hamper a recovery in oil demand growth this year as financial difficulties in developing countries offset increased consumption among industrialised nations, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said Friday.

Taking an axe to its demand forecasts, the Paris-based thinktank warned that weak oil markets remained top-heavy with supply and said a sustained price recovery would require a return to economic health in Asia.

"Demand projections have had to be lowered again for 1999 in the light of the most recent indications of a further worsening of the underlying economic situation," the IEA said in its monthly Oil Market Report.

"We remain convinced that sustained recovery in oil markets will require a reestablishment of Asian economic growth and that does not look imminent," the agency added.

The agency said 600,000 barrels per day (bpd) on average from its projection for world demand for 1999 to 75 million barrels a day, forecasting annual growth of 1.1 million barrels daily. It said demand last year had proven weaker than expected with only 400,000 barrels a day of growth to 73.9 million.

The forecasts paint a gloomy picture for oil producing countries which were hoping they had seen the worst of a slump which took average oil prices last year to 22-year lows.

OPEC and other producing countries cut supply last year but saw their efforts to raise prices blocked by falling

Asian demand and mountainous inventories.

Oil stocks, though lower by the end of November, remained in a year-on-year surplus of 96 million barrels, the IEA said.

"Inventories are still high and there is some way to go before those OECD stocks and the missing barrels held in independent storage outside the OECD come down," said David Knapp, editor of the IEA report.

The agency said "a significant proportion" of this year's projected increase in demand was based on an assumption of normal weather patterns after a very mild northern hemisphere winter in 1998.

Extra demand among Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations would account for 670,000 bpd or 60 per cent of the projected increase.

"Oil demand growth in non-OECD countries is expected to slow marginally in 1999 with a slump in demand in the former Soviet Union and weaker growth in Latin America more than offsetting a modest acceleration of growth in China," it added.

It warned that a new financial crisis in Brazil could hurt Latin American demand patterns. "There's definitely a possibility that we might have to revise down demand figures for Brazil," said IEA analyst Trevor Morgan.

China stands out as the best prospect for oil exporters who until last year could depend on Asian economies to soak up large volumes of incremental sales.

"China which has largely been insulated from the

financial and economic difficulties that have swept across much of East Asia, is expected to continue to grow at a steady rate, although this will depend on the success with which the authorities are able to address structural problems," said the IEA.

It said Chinese demand this year was projected to grow 2.8 per cent or 120,000 barrels daily to 4.29 million.

From the supply side, the agency said the prospects for growth in non-OPEC oil output also had receded because of the impact of low prices on oil company spending.

Non-OPEC supply growth for 1999 was projected at 400,000 bpd, half that estimated in last month's report, for a total 45.0 million.

"The key factor (for non-OPEC supply) is reduced levels of upstream spending in 1999," the report said. "Higher supply from the North Sea and Latin America provides most of the non-OPEC increment in 1999. Supplies from both North America and the former Soviet Union are expected to decline."

Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) producers, who supply the remaining 40 per cent of world needs, are expected to consider a further round of output cuts at a meeting in March provided they can settle a quarrel over compliance with existing supply curbs.

Meanwhile, analysts said this week that low oil prices are likely to mean a second year in succession in 1999 of little or no growth in supply from producers outside of the OPEC group.

Estimates vary, but new projections forecast incre-

mental non-OPEC production ranging from zero growth to a modest gain of 500,000 barrels per day.

Current IEA analysis of plans for new field development shows a yearly non-OPEC gain of 720,000 barrels per day.

Analysts say that forecast is looking increasingly unrealistic. "We now expect non-OPEC supply to fall marginally in 1998 and to increase only 200,000 barrels per day in 1999," said Warburg Dillon Read in its Oil Market Outlook.

"Low oil prices have already provoked a sharp worldwide downturn in upstream expenditure with direct but lagged consequences for supply growth in OPEC and non-OPEC areas alike," the report said.

Prices for international benchmark Brent crude averaged just \$13.34 a barrel in 1998, the lowest annual average since 1976 and a third below a 1997 average of \$19.30.

"Given the low growth rates for non-OPEC production outside Europe and Latin America, it is not too difficult to construct a case in which there is no growth at all in non-OPEC output in 1999," said the Centre for Global Energy Studies.

"Although the conventional wisdom is that non-OPEC supply is not particularly sensitive to oil prices, the experience of the past 10 years suggests that non-OPEC supply does respond to prices often with a lag of a year or so — as drilling activity and investment plans are modified in the light of upstream profitability," the London-based centre said.

A Reuters end-year survey showed 1998 non-OPEC supplies climbing by just 210,000 barrels per day over year-earlier levels, a 0.5 per cent gain.

Non-OPEC supply had grown by 900,000 barrels per day on average in 1996 and 1997 driven by new technology, lower costs and high oil prices.

Non-OPEC's 44.5 million barrels daily supplies about 60 per cent of the 75 million barrel-a-day world oil market needs.

"Previously we saw 1999 growth of about a million barrels per day, but the unfavourable drilling economics and lower cash flow we've seen have led us to a current growth projection of 500,000 barrels per day from our country by country forecast," said Mike Barry of Energy Market Consultants.

Barry said the outlook stemmed from growth potential outside of the North Sea and North America as well as the possibility of decisions by some oil firms to put off decisions to delay new field developments as long as oil prices stay above \$10 a barrel.

The Centre for Global Energy Studies said that at least 10 per cent of the 500,000 marginal "stripper" wells had been shut-in in the United States, reducing output by around 130,000 barrels per day. In Canada, 100,000 barrels per day of heavy oil production had also been closed.

Non-OPEC countries like Mexico and Norway reduced supplies last year in coordination with OPEC in an effort to lift oil prices.

Exchange Rates Thursday, 14-01-99 ACCESS 4546868											
CURRENCY	JORDAN DNR	SAUDI RIAL	U.S. DOLLAR	EURO	YEN	PAKISTANI RUPEE	INDIAN RUPEE	TAIWANESE DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	THAI BATH
JORDAN DNR	1.0000	0.1887	0.1927	1.8778	1.8389	0.1945	2.3466	0.2077	0.7060		
SAUDI RIAL	5.2980	1.0000	1.0212	9.9485	9.7424	1.0302	12.4326	1.1004	3.7510		
U.S. DOLLAR	5.1851	0.9793	1.0000	9.7422	9.5403	1.0088	12.1748	1.0776	3.6732		
EURO	0.5325	0.1035	0.1035	1.0000	0.9533	1.0258	12.487	0.1106	0.3770		
YEN	0.5438	0.1026	0.1048	1.0212	1.0000	1.0507	12.761	0.1130	0.3850		
PAKISTANI RUPEE	5.1427	0.9707	0.9912	9.6568	9.4567	1.0000	12.0679	1.0681	3.6410		
INDIAN RUPEE	0.4261	0.0804	0.0821	0.8002	0.7836	0.0828	10.0000	0.0885	0.3017		
TAIWANESE DOLLAR	4.8145	0.9087	0.9280	9.4007	9.2033	0.9352	11.2873	1.0000	3.4087		
HONG KONG DOLLAR	21.4831	4.0548	4.1408	40.3405	39.5044	4.1774	50.4126	4.4621	15.2100		
SINGAPORE DOLLAR	1.4124	0.2868	0.2722	3.6822	3.5973	0.2746	3.3144	0.2834	1.0000		
THAI BATH	0.8538	0.1612	0.1646	1.6035	1.5703	0.1681	2.0039	0.1774	0.6048		
THAI BATH	2.3854	0.4470	0.4585	4.4473	4.3551	0.4605	5.5577	0.4918	1.6768		
FRANCE FRANC	1.9205	0.3625	0.3702	3.6052	3.5315	0.3734	4.5068	0.3989	1.3597		
GERMANY MARK	7.9431	1.4963	1.5310	14.9154	14.6083	1.5445	18.8394	1.6498	5.6237		
JAPAN YEN	1.6047	0.3029	0.3093	3.0132	2.9508	0.3120	3.7655	0.3333	1.1361		
HOLLAND GUILDER	2.6895	0.5037	0.5144	5.0368	4.9011	0.5189	6.2630	0.5463	1.8398		
ITALY LIRA	10.9503	2.0744	2.1153	20.6373	20.2068	2.1371	25.7900	2.2827	7.7811		
SPAIN PESA	23.4468	4.4258	4.5183	44.0282	43.1157	4.5593	55.0210	4.8700	16.0004		
PORTUGAL ESCUDO	48.8487	9.2202	9.4155	91.7274	89.8262	9.4887	114.8295	10.1481	34.5804		
AUSTRALIA DOLLAR	2.2218	0.4205	0.4284	4.1833	4.0566	0.4332	5.2278	0.4827	1.5773		
NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	3.9374	0.7432	0.7588	7.3936	7.2404	0.7655	9.2387	0.8178	2.7877		
FINLAND MARKKA	2.0830	0.3959	0.4017	3.9389	3.8548	0.4018	4.9274	0.5274	1.7500		
CYPRUS POUND	18.8827	3.1481	3.2117	31.2890	30.6405	3.2401	39.1011	4.0630	11.7372		
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	2.1825	0.4078	0.4164	4.0565	3.9728	0.4201	5.0898	0.4887	1.5398		
CANADA DOLLAR	1.2105	0.2285	0.2333	2.2731	2.2260	0.2354	2.8406	0.2514	0.8570		

MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DNR

CENTRAL BANK BULLETIN											
CURRENCY	US DOLLAR	EURO	YEN	PAKISTANI RUPEE	INDIAN RUPEE	TAIWANESE DOLLAR	HONG KONG DOLLAR	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	THAI BATH	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	AUSTRALIA DOLLAR
US DOLLAR	1.0000	0.6964	0.7555	0.1778	0.8002	0.5393	0.6240	1.1868			
EURO	0.6964	1.0000	0.8607	0.1075	0.5322	0.3300	0.3421	0.7054			
YEN	0.7555	0.8607	1.0000	0.2492	1.4769	0.8875	1.0101	1.5565			
PAKISTANI RUPEE	0.1778	0.1075	0.2492	1.0000	0.2418	1.1988	0.7197	1.1908			
INDIAN RUPEE	0.8002	0.5322	1.4769	0.2418	1.0000	4.9500	2.9796	33.8789			
TAIWANESE DOLLAR	0.5393	0.3300	0.8875	1.1988	4.9500	1.0000	86.1327	884.9815			
HONG KONG DOLLAR	0.6240	0.3421	1.0101	0.7197	2.9796	86.1327	1.0000	11.8112			
SINGAPORE DOLLAR	1.1868	0.7054	1.5565	1.1908	33.8789	11.8112	11.8112	1.0000			
THAI BATH	1.1868	0.7054	1.5565	1.1908	33.8789	11.8112	11.8112	1.0000			
NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	0.8002	0.5322	1.4769	0.2418	1.0000	4.9500	2.9796	33.8789			
AUSTRALIA DOLLAR	0.5393	0.3300	0.8875	1.1988	4.9500	1.0000	86.1327	884.9815			

WORLD STOCK MARKETS											
STOCK MARKET	INDEX	CLOSING	LAST CLOSE	CHANGE	PRECIOUS METALS	METAL	ASK	BID			
FRANKFURT	DAX	4931.80	5030.30	-208.50	GOLD	266.10	266.10	266.10			
HONG KONG	HANG SENG	10183.13	10273.77	-90.64	SILVER	5.18	5.18	5.18			
LONDON	FT-100	5860.10	6033.80	-163.60	PLATINUM	353.00	353.00	353.00			
NEW YORK	DJ INDEX	9340.56	9474.69	-125.12							
NEW YORK	NYSE COMPOSITE	590.71	594.59	-3.88							
NEW YORK	AMER COMP	89.30	89.62	-0.32							
NEW YORK	S&P 500	1234.45	1239.54	-5.09							
TOKYO	NIKKEI-225	13738.85	13403.80	335.05							
PARIS	CAC 40	3958.72	4100.70	-141.98							
FRANKFURT	COMEXGOLD	461.26	464.30	-3.04							

Brazil gives up fight over cherished currency

BRASILIA (R) — Brazil gave up defending its cherished currency on Friday, bowing to overwhelming pressure to let the inflation-busting real float in a move that international markets hoped might yet save the world's eighth biggest economy.

The real, cornerstone of a five-year plan that dragged Brazil out of decades of economic chaos, plunged immediately to a low of 1.55 in

the dollar before clawing back to 1.47, a roughly 12 per cent devaluation from Thursday's close of 1.32.

World markets had long feared a big devaluation in Brazil might wreck havoc on global growth, but with Friday's move they celebrated what they saw as the country's best chance of avoiding financial meltdown.

Finance Minister Pedro Malan and central bank President Francisco Lopes

were due to fly to Washington on Friday in a bid to secure support from the U.S. government and the International Monetary Fund.

Brazil attempted a controlled devaluation on Wednesday when it allowed the real to fall more than eight per cent against the dollar.

But the central bank on Friday abandoned attempts to keep it in a new band as billions of dollars flooded out of the country, running currency reserves down to about

\$40 billion. Friday's fall in the real meant the currency had devalued about 18 per cent from Tuesday's old limit of 1.22 to the greenback, cutting the spending power of 160 million.

In a statement, the central bank said it would not intervene in the foreign exchange markets on Friday and would set new foreign exchange rules on Monday. It did not go into details.

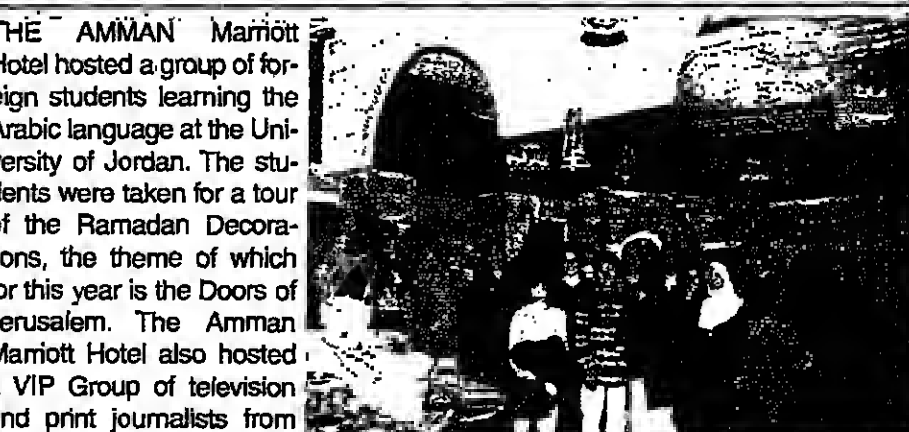
"The central bank had to do this because it had no other way to manage the

currency," said Jaime Alves, an economist at Banco Patente in Sao Paulo.

Brazil introduced the real in 1994 after decades of soaring inflation and the currency has served as the anchor of Brazil's economic recovery since then.

Latin America's economic powerhouse averted a near-devaluation last September after being buffeted by financial storms from Russia's economic collapse and swirling crises in Asia.

But the pressure became unbearable this month after former President Itamar Franco, now governor of Minas Gerais state, declared a temporary moratorium on the state's debt to the federal government.



THE AMMAN Marriott Hotel hosted a group of foreign students learning the Arabic language at the University of Jordan. The students were taken for a tour of the Ramadan Decorations, the theme of which for this year is the Doors of Jerusalem. The Amman Marriott Hotel also hosted a VIP Group of television and print journalists from the United States last week as part of the familiarisation trip to the region. During their stay, the group was taken to many areas around Jordan, from Daba'a to Mukheibeh and from Petra to Ajloun. The Amman Marriott catering team produced beautiful food selections in the most inaccessible areas, from Black-tie service in the vastness of Wadi Rum to omelets in a cave inside Petra.

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THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS
1 Half-goat man
6 Cattle collection
10 Pretense
14 Be as one
15 Shaving-cream additive
16 Lay asphalt
17 Di
20 Orop
21 Pot starter
22 Bloopers
23 Outwitting maneuver
24 Neighbor of Vietnam
25 Heavenly creatures
28 Damaged by blows
32 Hideaways
33 Check recipient
34 Richie hit, You
35 Ouch cheese
36 Hitched
37 Knife thrust
38 Tin Tin
39 Outcast
40 Thorax
41 In shreds
43 Reprimands
44 Beyond
48 Attention-getting sound
49 Whirlpools
49 From a distance
50 Sail-out letters
53 Di
56 Half a golf course
57 Niagara's source
58 Idaho's largest city
59 Mimicked
60 Moselle tributary
61 Painful places

DOWN
1 Devilizes
2 Taj Mahal city
3 Math subj.
4 Desire
5 Brings to mind
6 Precipitous
7 Besides
8 Kang's toy
9 Thwarted
10 Meager
11 Saint's glow
12 Affirm
13 Recruits dinner
16 Baseballs
18 Slaughter
19 Lansbury TV series, "Murder, She..."
23 Salon treatment, for short
24 Stratum
25 Vigilant
26 Gymnast
27 James Dean film
28 Used an oven
29 Gave a score
30 Expunge
31 Money owed
32 Person who must be paid
36 Unorthodox beliefs
37 Wedge-shaped piece of wood
39 Even
40 Small angels
42 Labored
43 Scorch
45 Following
46 St. Vincent Millay
47 Tap problem
48 Take lunch
49 Largest continent
50 Be up and about
51 Got up
52 Mine products
54 Gunowners' grp.
55 Talk baby-talk

Peanuts

THIS? THIS IS A CALENDAR...
IT TELLS YOU WHAT DAY IT IS, WHAT MONTH IT IS, AND WHAT YEAR IT IS...
NO, IT DOESN'T TELL YOU WHERE YOUR MOM IS...

Andy Capp

YOU DESERVE A MEDAL FOR RUSHING HOME ON YOUR LUNCH BREAK TO DO THIS THEN RUSHING BACK!
I WOULDN'T SAY THAT!
ANYONE WHO LEAVES HIM TO GO BACK TO WORK IS A SLACKER!

Mutt'n'Jeff

SURE, I GUESS MAYBE A LOT OF PEOPLE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT US...
O.K. BIKER, WHAT?
WELL, LIVE WHERE WE WERE BORN AND WHEN!
WELL, I WAS BORN IN SAN FRANCISCO ON NOVEMBER 15TH 1907!
AND UNDER THE SIGN OF THE ZODIAC I AM KNOWN AS SCORPIO!
UNDER WHAT SIGN WERE YOU BORN?
ROOM FOR RENT AND I AM KNOWN AS JEFF!

THE BETTER HALF By Glasbergen

"The milk smells okay. It must be our relationship that's going sour..."

JUMBLE THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Nick Aronson

Unscramble these four jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

NEVAK
TOORB
FRAMOT
GINEEN

Answer:

Yesterday's Jumbles: CHOKO BAKED RUBBER
Answer: trilling for oil is this — "CRUDE" WORK

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Consumers accuse merchants of announcing fake sales

WHEREAS CONSUMERS complain of high prices and low quality of clothing, merchants express dismay at the decline in prices of all types of clothing noting that they are being sold at less than the prices of past years. Consumers on the one hand describe the merchants as stubborn for refusing to lower prices in any way while on the other, shopowners respond that import of clothing is only becoming a service to traders in the countries of origin.

Merchants emphasize that the quality of clothing in the market is excellent but "may be the bad living conditions of the people are a main cause for not buying." The merchants attribute the weak purchasing power in the market to many reasons among which is the large number of boutiques which, according to statistics, are no less than 35,000 shops. "This large number of boutiques compared to the number of Jordanians, who are mostly from the middle and poor classes, is high," the merchants said demanding that licensing of new boutiques be stopped.

Some of the traders who own a number of shops and who conduct research on the Jordanian market to be able to adjust with the conditions of the people and the needs of the society estimate the decline in sales to be around 70 per cent. They say that if the situation continues as it is now, sales could fall by much more.

A number of traders said the timing of exams at schools and universities has negatively affected the purchasing process as mothers could not leave their children studying at home and go shopping for clothes. Even the students themselves were not psychologically prepared to think about anything other than their stud-

ies. Another reason cited by the merchants for the low purchasing power was the door-to-door sales which become more common. "Such a sales strategy helps salesmen to offer clothing at cheap prices without having to worry about paying rent or taxes to the government," the merchants said stressing that a solution should be found for this problem.

The merchant asked that imposing stocks from various foreign countries not be allowed because it negatively affects the shops that sell ready-made local and foreign clothing. They also requested that the government reconsider the taxes and customs that they pay on imported clothes because lower duties would lessen the burden on the consumers and traders.

For their part, the consumers saw the close-out stores which import goods at low prices as providing a great service to the people as such stores enables them to buy high quality products at reasonable prices. The consumers called on the merchants who criticise and fight the close-out stores to improve the quality of their products and to lower prices in order to compete with the goods on sale at close-out stores.

Consumers complained that some merchants announced discounts of between 20 per cent and 50 per cent especially before the Eid but practically they have hiked their prices so that when it comes to the discounts announced, prices are just equal to similar goods at other stores. As such, consumers demanded that the concerned parties put a system for discounts so as not to be faked ones but rather governed by rules to prevent any merchant from price manipulation (Al Dustour).

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COMPANY	OPEN	CLOSE	CHANGE
BANKS			
ARAB BK	217.000	217.000	0.00%
NTL BK	1.240	1.240	-0.02%
CAROL AMMAN BK	2.680	2.750	-3.31%
BLK OF JO	1.570	1.530	-3.19%
MIDDLE EAST BK	1.040	1.030	-0.96%
INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK	1.470	1.440	-2.04%
THE HOUSING BK	2.380	2.740	-4.88%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.880	1.840	-2.13%
JO. GULF BK	0.700	0.700	0.00%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.700	1.690	-0.59%
UNION BK	1.160	1.100	-5.17%
JO. INVESTMENT BK	1.400	1.340	-4.29%
BEEST BANK	0.870	0.860	-1.14%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.580	0.540	-6.90%

BANKS INDEX 222.880 POINT -0.72%

INSURANCE			
MIDDLE EAST INS	3.450	3.450	0.00%
GENERAL ARABIA INS	2.040	2.040	0.00%
JO. FRENCH INS	2.700	2.700	0.00%
PHILADELPHIA INS	2.100	2.000	-4.76%
AHLIA INS	1.710	1.160	-33.33%

INSURANCE INDEX 126.370 POINT -0.23%

SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.720	1.700	-1.16%
WIND ELECTRICITY	1.650	1.710	+3.61%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.850	0.860	+1.18%
JO. INTL. TRADING CEN	0.270	0.270	0.00%
AL-RAT	5.500	5.400	-1.82%
COMMODORE	1.130	1.100	-2.65%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	0.840	0.800	-4.76%
ARAB INTL. FOR WIVES	1.540	1.540	0.00%
JO. BAYEL HOLDING	0.850	0.850	0.00%
UNIBED LANG TRANS	1.160	1.170	+0.86%

SERVICES INDEX 110.790 POINT -0.37%

INDUSTRY			
AT-TANBES	1.100	1.100	0.00%
CEMENT	3.820	3.790	-0.79%
PHOSPHATE	1.770	1.810	+2.26%
ARAB POTASH	2.940	3.400	+15.65%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.500	10.550	+0.48%
THE IND. COMM. & AGRI	1.070	1.080	+0.93%
UNION MILLS	1.740	1.740	0.00%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2.810	2.850	+1.42%
CERAMIC IND	1.120	1.110	-0.89%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.340	1.220	-9.03%
NTL STEEL	0.480	0.500	+4.17%
ARAB ALUMINUM	0.530	0.530	0.00%
DAR AL DAWA	0.430	0.430	0.00%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLE	0.570	0.530	-6.84%
JO. STEEL	0.890	0.890	0.00%
ARAB ALUMINUM	1.870	1.880	+0.53%
CHILDREN	1.250	1.220	-2.40%
UNION STEEL & POLYMER	0.400	0.400	0.00%
NTL IND	0.350	0.350	0.00%
PETRO-CHEMICAL	0.350	0.320	-8.57%
CHEMICAL & VEGETA	0.500	0.480	-4.00%
ROCKWOOL	0.290	0.290	0.00%
UNION CHEMICAL	1.120	1.010	-9.82%
GENERAL WYVES	3.150	3.150	0.00%
NTL CABLE	0.650	0.650	0.00%
SULPHUR-CHEMICALS	0.380	0.380	0.00%
ARAB CHEMICALS FOR PH	1.280	1.280	0.00%
EL-ZAY	1.370	1.330	-2.92%
UNION MODERN	0.680	0.680	0.00%
FOOD FACTORIES	1.000	1.000	0.00%
IND. RESOURCES	0.450	0.450	0.00%
NEW CAPLES	0.620	0.630	+1.61%
NTL ALUMINUM	0.720	0.690	-4.17%

INDUSTRY INDEX 84.260 POINT +1.54%

PARALLEL			
EXPORT BK/73	0.910	0.880	-3.30%
JO. TRADING FACILITIES	0.450	0.410	-8.89%
CENTRAL STORG	0.330	0.330	0.00%
UNION INVEST CORP	0.580	0.700	+20.34%
AL-EKRA	0.810	0.780	-3.70%
AL-SHARQ	1.080	1.050	-2.78%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0.360	0.360	0.00%
AL-DAWLAH	0.580	0.580	0.00%
ARAB INVESTORS	1.000	0.950	-5.00%
ARAB INTL. TRADE	0.210	0.210	0.00%
MACHINERY EQUIP	0.480	0.470	-2.08%
OPTICAL & AUDIO	0.450	0.410	-9.33%
READY MIX CONCRETE	0.830	0.830	0.00%
NAMCO	0.260	0.250	-3.85%
TEXTILE & PLASTIC	0.250	0.250	0.00%
UNION EAST PHAR	0.850	0.850	0.00%
UNION TOBACCO	2.750	3.000	+9.09%
AL-RAZ	0.840	0.840	0.00%
UNITED ENL IND	0.210	0.200	-4.76%
NTL CERAMIC	0.400	0.390	-2.50%
TEXTILE MAHU	0.210	0.210	0.00%
PEAN	0.450	0.450	0.00%
NTL POLYMER	0.870	0.850	-2.31%
NUTRI DOR	0.890	0.710	-20.22%
ARAB JO. WYVES	1.020	0.950	-6.86%
JO. MARKETING	1.410	1.350	-4.26%

GRAND INDEX 174.51 POINT -0.13%

Zurich becomes Europe's costliest city — survey

LONDON (R) — Zurich leaptfrogged Oslo to become Europe's most expensive city in December 1998, while Tokyo remained the world's costliest city, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) said Friday.

Economic turmoil and currency depreciation pushed the cost of living down in many emerging and transition countries last year and there are now only five Asian cities in the top 20 compared with eight a year ago, the EIU said.

Jakarta plunged from the world's 87th most expensive city in December 1997 to the 120th. Singapore, Taipei and Seoul all slipped and New Delhi was the cheapest city in Asia, just below Jakarta.

Japanese cities remained the most expensive for expatriates to live in, the EIU said, but the cost of living also dropped along with the slide in the yen. Osaka took second place behind Tokyo, the same ranking as in last year's survey.

The collapse of the rouble eroded living costs in Moscow, which plummeted from third place a year ago

to 88th place in EIU's latest survey. St. Petersburg captured the position as the cheapest city in Europe as its cost of living index fell to 115th place from 83.

Within the European Union (EU), Athens and Lisbon were the cheapest while Paris' costs have risen and it is now the most expensive in the EU.

London rose one spot in the ranking to the ninth place, although down from its peak of sixth place in June 1998.

Australia and New Zealand, whose currencies depreciated by about 20 per cent against the U.S. dollar since last year's survey, have seen a corresponding drop in the cost of living index. Sydney, the most expensive city in Australia, is now 24 per cent cheaper than New York.

New York also continued to climb in the rankings, just like most other U.S. cities, due to the strong dollar. New York now takes the 14th place, while Atlanta, in 68th place, remains the cheapest city in the U.S.

China, where the yuan has not been permitted to

devalue, has become more expensive for expatriates to live in. Beijing is in 13th place, Shanghai in 16th and Guangzhou in 27th — on the same ranking as Brussels.

Western Europe remains a costly region: European cities occupy all the places from 4th to 12th in the global ranking.

Libreville in Gabon ranked the most expensive city in Africa and seventh in the world.

A depreciating real has led to a fall in cost of living in both Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, ranked 37th and 38th, and since the devaluation these cities will become even cheaper.

Three quarters of Latin American cities fall in the bottom half of the rankings.

The EIU's bi-annual worldwide cost of living survey compares prices and products in 123 cities around the world with the purpose of providing companies with a guide from which allowances can be calculated for executives and their families being sent overseas.

Israeli potash company to stay in local hands

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The company which controls mining operations in the Dead Sea is to remain in Israeli hands, the press reported here Friday.

Erwin Eisenberg, son of the late Saul Eisenberg who founded Israel Corporation in 1969, is to sell his 53 per cent share in the company to Ofer Brothers Investment.

Eisenberg reportedly reached an agreement in principle Wednesday with Sami and Yuli Ofer to sell his interest in the group for \$330 million. The decision came while negotiations were in full swing with a Canadian company, Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan (PCS), which already holds a nine per cent stake in Israel Corporation.

The English-language Jerusalem Post said PCS was thought to be willing to pay up to \$350 million, but Eisenberg wanted to make a quick sale. Selling to a foreign concern would require Israeli government approval, which could have taken several

months. The projected foreign sale had been strongly criticised as depriving the country of control of one of its few natural resources.

The Eisenberg family said Monday they had decided to sell the Israel Corporation because of an internal struggle over the inheritance of their father who died in 1997.

Israel Corporation, one of Israel's biggest companies, owns a 52 per cent interest in Israel Chemicals Ltd, which controls the mining of potash, bromine, chlorine and magnesium from the Dead Sea, Israel's top natural resource.

It also has stakes in other major Israeli firms, including a 49 per cent interest in the Zim shipping line and a 29 per cent share of Israel Oil Refineries.

The Ofer said in a statement they would not dissolve the Israel Corporation, but use it as an umbrella company for a large proportion of their business in Israel.

Spanish bank giant emerges

MADRID (AFP) — Spain's biggest and third biggest banks announced Friday they planned to merge through a share swap, creating a financial giant with \$243 billion in assets.

The planned de-up between Banco Santander SA, the country's largest bank, and Banco Central Hispanico (BCH) SA, would instantly create a major force among Europe's banks.

Banco Santander said the boards of both banks, which have major interests in Latin America, would meet later to discuss the terms of the merger.

The secretary of state for the economy, Cristobal Montoro, said the merger "is a very important operation for the Spanish financial system and the economy." Rumours about an impending consolidation in the Spanish banking sector had been in the air for months, as bankers fretted that the launch of the single European currency, the euro, on Jan. 1, would require them to boost competitiveness in order to stay in the game alongside leaner rivals.

By combining forces and eliminating duplicate areas of operations, such as backroom work, smaller banks can make significant cost savings, according to this thinking.

The new entity would be catapulted into the Top Ten of Europe's biggest banks, as calculated on an asset basis.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR JANUARY, SATURDAY 16, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Yesterday's lesson continues, as a tough authority figure bosses you around. Do what you're told. You're learning a valuable lesson through experience. You can make it easy or you can make it hard. It's up to you. If you go along with the programme, however, you're going to find this whole experience a lot more fun.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You're being tugged pretty fiercely by somebody who wants you to visit. It's hard to down such an enticing request, and you shouldn't. Figure out how to handle your chores another way. You might give away something else, too. Looks like a friend could use an old item that's been taking up space in your garage. Get rid of it.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You might be able to talk an older person into lending you money today, but its more likely that you'll get good advice. Don't be disappointed. Look at this as a lesson — that's exactly what it is. You're learning how to talk to people about your financial situation and to let them coach you, so you can become fabulously wealthy.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) What is love, anyway? Is it a partnership between two people who will stick together no matter what? Is it ongoing dialogue that stimulates creativity? It certainly isn't boring. Don't throw up your hands in frustration because your sweetheart doesn't seem to understand what you want. Listen instead. That's your secret.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) The job you thought should take about half an hour may consume the entire morning — not because it's so difficult, but because every little thing may go wrong. Look at it this way. You're learning how to deal with complications. Its making you an expert, and you love being an expert. Too bad you have to learn the hard way.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) This would be the perfect day to hide away with a person you love and admire. If you get the person started, he or she will do most of the talking. That's OK. This person has some really great ideas. If you don't already have someone like that in your life, your odds of finding one today are quite good.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Looks like a friend has a good idea for fun and games this weekend. There's work involved, and a lot of planning, especially if you're not the only one going on this excursion. This could be quite complicated, but you know what? It could turn out to be a lot of fun. Put together a team and make it happen.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Things are going your way, but don't get cocky. Complications are coming, so you still need to be looking ahead. You're in the mood for planning, and that's good, because planning is required. So is more information. Ask a few leading questions and you could find out more than you ever wanted to know.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You probably don't spend much time thinking about money, if you're like most Sagittarians. Today, however, you may notice yourself scheming about what you could sell, buy or trade to make a bit of profit. Being an entrepreneur is not a sin. In fact, it's a good way to see the world, and pay for it as you go along.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You are a force to be reckoned with against today. You can use skills you've learned recently to achieve a goal. It'll be good practice. Besides learning, you're also teaching. Set a good example, not only with your determination but also with your cheerful attitude. If anybody can make work look like fun, it's you.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You're strong right now, and getting stronger. You're also under pressure, but that's OK. When the going gets tough, the tough get going, right? Remember that if you feel like cashing in your chips, do that thing you've been trying to avoid. It's just one of the hurdles you need to clear, to reach your greatest potential.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You've been attracting attention lately, most of it good. You're generous and magnanimous and cheerful and bright, and everybody around you wants more of whatever it is you have. You might be getting some pretty good offers, but they're not going to happen if you hide out in your room. Get out there and stir things up a bit.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

Total-Petrofina to sell assets worth up to 1.5 billion euros

PARIS (AFP) — French oil company Total's acquisition of Petrofina of Belgium will result in the sale of assets worth up to 10 billion francs (1.5 billion euros) over two years. Total managing director Thierry Desmarest said Thursday.

The money from the sales would be used "to help finance our very ambitious development programme" for exploration and production, Desmarest said.

He said told a shareholders' meeting that part of the money would also be used to buy back more Total shares on the market. The company acquired about three million shares in December.

But if the merger with Petrofina was to be a success, and create value for shareholders, "we must quickly use the synergies already announced."


Total announced at the beginning of December that it had agreed to buy 41 per cent of Petrofina and would make an offer for the rest, to create Europe's third largest oil group.

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Hingis, Davenport vye for psychological advantage

SYDNEY (AFP) — The world's top two women tennis players will meet in the final of the Sydney International Saturday vying for the chance to score a psychological blow ahead of the first grand slam of the season.

Top seed Lindsay Davenport proved too powerful and too accurate for a tired Steffi Graf in their semi-final clash, triumphing 6-2, 7-5 while Martina Hingis was made to dig deep as she toppled Austrian Barbara Schett 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7-5).

In the men's final in-form eighth seed American Todd Martin will meet Spain's Alex Corretja, the top seed.

Hingis and Davenport swapped places at the top of the WTA rankings last year and the 18-year-old Swiss sensation is desperate to regain her crown, which is a realistic possibility if she wins in Sydney and then at the Australian Open in Melbourne next week.

Davenport, who has played Hingis 13 times, losing six, swept through her first set against Graf, forcing backhand errors from the German favourite, who seemed stiff but free from a stomach upset that left her visibly unwell in her quarter-final victory over Venus Williams.

But the former No. 1, whom Davenport rates a possible winner next week, again showed her fighting spirit, saving three match points before succumbing to the 22-year-old.

Davenport said she will try to move Hingis around the court and attack her second serve. "Martina is playing very well and it'll be difficult to win," she said.

"She'll be keen to win the first title of the year but I'll



Steffi Graf of Germany returns a shot at the Sydney International. Graf defeated Williams 4-6, 6-2, 6-4 (AFP photo)

just be aggressive and do what I can."

She said she was more consistent than last year "but I don't go for as many stupid shots anymore and I try to get the ball back deeper."

"I'm smarter and can handle the big situations better."

Hingis survived a hard-fought third set tie-break against lowly ranked Schett under the blazing Sydney sun to secure her berth in the final.

The Swiss teenager took the first set 6-3 but strong forehand returns gave Schett the edge in the second, with the Hingis losing it 3-6.

In a seesawing third set, Hingis broke to go 2-0 up, but the Austrian, who reached the fourth round of the Australian Open last year, fought back to 2-2.

The set went to serve until the 11th game when Schett made the break with

a powerful across court forehand winner.

But in a match dominated by long rallies, Hingis produced some classic tennis, including a miraculous backhand passing shot at full stretch, to force a tie break.

She broke to lead 2-1 but the Austrian immediately levelled and moved 5-3 ahead before unforced errors gave the game to Hingis 7-5.

Hingis, who appeared sluggish, complained the match started too early before many spectators had arrived or television coverage started.

"It was very early in the morning and after the match I asked why we had to play that early," she said. "I probably should have woken up a little bit earlier. I'm not much of an early bird."

Martin is lurking as a genuine Australian Open contender after thrashing

the usually durable Austrian Thomas Muster.

The 28-year-old served up notice to the top seeds that he means business at Melbourne Park with a resounding 6-2, 6-1 victory.

Martin, a Stockholm Open winner two months ago, is hitting form at the right time and has a real chance of bettering his 1994 performance in Melbourne when he lost in the final to Pete Sampras in straight sets.

"I do feel that today was the best I've hit the ball in a long time," said the 15th seed, who won in Sydney in 1996.

"I'm thrilled with the way things have gone this week. I'm glad to be able to get this much match practice and it means I can prepare myself that much better for next week."

Corretja outclassed last year's champion Karol Kucera for a 7-5, 6-4 triumph.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN PREVIEW

Steffi nearing her best for Australian Open

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Former World No. 1 Steffi Graf says she is nearing her dynamic best after an injury-plagued year.

"I'm physically in very good shape, it's been quite a while starting the year feeling well without any injury," she said after four matches at the Sydney International before Lindsay Davenport knocked her out in the semi-finals. "I'm satisfied where I am right now. I've always been motivated but now I have nothing to lose." Graf usually avoids playing tournament tennis a week before a Grand Slam, but made her first appearance at Sydney since 1984 in order to get vital match practice.

She goes into the Australian Open ranked 10th after clawing her way back up the ladder after knee and wrist injuries wrecked most of her 1998 campaign.

Graf, known on the circuit as "Fraulein Forehand", dropped out of the world rankings last year for the first time since her debut in 1983 but fought back to finish at nine. Winner of 21 Grand Slam titles, just three short of Australian Margaret Court's record 24, the 29-year-old battled back from injury to win three titles with a match record of 33-9. She spent December in Florida working on her fitness but went down with gastric flu in a Hong Kong exhibition earlier this month.

The ailment resurfaced at Sydney but Graf, although tired, insisted it would not pose a threat and she could last seven matches. Graf has won at Melbourne four times and with 106 singles titles all-time knows what it takes to win.



Andre Agassi

Agassi talks up another Grand Slam title

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Andre Agassi's commitment has not always been what it should be but the former World No. 1 is confident he can win another Grand Slam title.

Agassi's fortunes have peaked and tumbled through a 13-year playing career more resembling a movie star's than a tennis pro's.

He has always promised more than the three majors he has won and he now says he is eyeing his second Australian Open title, especially as Pete Sampras has stayed away. The Australian Open has not been Agassi's favourite Grand Slam — this will be only his fourth appearance in 14 years — but when he did show he beat Sampras in the 1995 final.

A few months later he supplanted Sampras as World No. 1 and held on to it for 30 weeks before another brief flirtation at the top in January 1996.

Agassi's star is on the ascent once again and last year he spurred from No. 122 at the start of the year to finish at six having won five titles and played in five other finals.

"I feel more ready now than I have in a long time," said the 28-year-old. "Last year I got so caught up in the day-

to-day grind of what I needed to do that when it really came down to being in physical and mental peak form for the big ones I was a little behind on the eight-ball."

"All of a sudden when the pressure was on to really step it up it really surprised me, I wasn't ready for it."

"Now it's different, now I'm in a position where I can direct all my energies towards the big matches, that's a nice luxury when you spend the year away from it, you appreciate it a lot more."

Agassi is not concerned by his fitness going into the Australian Open, pointing to his heavy number of matches last year.

"When you play 75 matches in one year and you play well into December, you don't have to worry about your shape, to be honest."

"It's quite the opposite, if you continue to work you're taking steps backwards."

"I didn't have to start working hard until I got down here and it's coming around as anticipated... my body doesn't know that it's 1999."

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Sharpe starts for Sampdoria

GENOA (AFP) — Former England international Lee Sharpe will make his first start for Italian Serie A side Sampdoria at Bari on Sunday. Sharpe made an excellent impression in his first game for Sampdoria against Bologna, where he was fielded by boss David Platt on the right side of midfield in an attacking role, coming on as a substitute. Sampdoria are still in danger of relegation and will be hoping Sharpe can help lift them clear. The former Leeds and Manchester United man has settled in well in Genoa and has found a flat in the Bogliasso district on a mountain side overlooking the sea.

Barca land De Boer twins

AMSTERDAM (AFP) — Spanish First Division giants Barcelona have finally clinched the signature of Holland's World Cup stars Frank and Ronald De Boer after a protracted transfer saga. Barcelona are to pay Dutch First Division club Ajax Amsterdam \$22 million for the pair confirmed the club on Friday. "The two players will leave without delay for Barcelona," said a club spokesman. The two players will join a growing band of Dutchmen at the Nou Camp. Former Ajax boss Louis Van Gaal already has compatriots Patrick Kluivert, Boudewijn Zenden, Philippe Cocu, Ruud Hesp, Winston Bogarde and Michael Reiziger on board at Barca. Barcelona offered \$22 million for the Dutch international pair last year but Ajax refused to release the brothers from their contracts, which run until 2004. The pair launched a legal bid to get out of their contracts, claiming they would quadruple their salary at Barcelona, but this failed. But this time Ajax agreed to the deal.

Arsenal complete Kanu signing

LONDON (AFP) — Nigerian international Nwankwo Kanu completed his move to English champions Arsenal on Friday after being given the all-clear from doctors following stringent medical tests. Arsenal, who are understood to have agreed a £4.5 million (\$8.5 million) transfer fee with Kanu's Italian club Inter Milan, had been concerned about the physical condition of the 22-year-old who has suffered from heart and knee problems in the past.

Davenport steps out of Evert's shadow

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Lindsay Davenport is the first American-born player to top the women's tennis rankings since Chris Evert in 1985.

But the 22-year-old admits she would never try to compare herself with the ice-cool Evert, who would rather lose a point than smudge her make-up.

"No, we're not the same sort of player," said the 1.89m (6ft 2-1/2in) Davenport who weighs in at 79kg (175lb).

"I suppose I work harder for my wins."

But they are similar in one respect. Both built their games on rock-solid baseline play, rarely venturing to the net.

But last year Davenport improved her mobility by losing 15kg and notched up a WTA Tour-leading 69 singles wins.

More importantly, she captured her first Grand Slam singles title in her first Grand Slam final at the U.S. Open when she beat No. 1 and defending champion Martina Hingis of Switzerland.

She did not drop a set at Flushing Meadows to prove that plain girls can triumph over the glamour gallery.

She had been a semi-finalist at the Australian and French Opens and with Natasha Zvereva was the doubles runner-up in all four Grand Slams.

She reached the finals of eight of the last 10 tournaments in 1998, winning five



Lindsay Davenport

of them, but losing the season-ending Championship final to Hingis in four sets in a best-of-five sets final.

Davenport thinks only six players can win the Australian Open — herself, Hingis, Steffi Graf, Venus Williams, Monica Seles and Jana Novotna.

And she is convinced she cracked a major mental barrier by winning the U.S. Open last year.

"To close out a Grand Slam

and be able to win that final point... every time you get in that situation is probably not as nerve-wracking as the first time you get there," she says.

"It took me a couple of times to get through the semi-finals but I won in my first Grand Slam final and hopefully I'll do the same in Melbourne."

Sceptics suggest Davenport is only No. 1 until Hingis gets her act together.

"That doesn't bother me,"

said Davenport, the 1996 Olympic champion.

"It seems like when Martina became No. 1 it was because Steffi was injured... they're always looking for something negative to say when you get to No. 1," Davenport said.

And many will hope her battle with Hingis develops into the same sort of rivalry Evert had with Hingis' namesake, Martina Navratilova, in the 70s and 80s.

Hingis in line for more success

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Martina Hingis does not believe in getting her lines crossed.

She has already set some amazing records for the young brigade in her single-minded pursuit of excellence.

At 12 she became the youngest-ever Grand Slam junior winner in the 1993 Roland Garros tournament, replacing Jennifer Capriati.

In 1995, she became the youngest woman player in the Open-era, which stretches back to 1968, to win a singles match at the Australian Open. She was 14.

In March, 1997, Hingis became the youngest ever world No. 1 at 16 years and six months, and in June that year she became the second-youngest U.S. Championship winner at 16 years and 11 months — two months older than Tracy Austin in 1979.

Triumphs at Wimbledon and in the Australian and U.S. Opens that year made her one of only six players to win three or more Grand Slams in a calendar year. She also became the first woman to earn \$3 million in a season.

Last year at 17 she became the youngest player to successfully defend a Grand Slam singles title in the Open era when she retained her Australian Open title.

She also became the first female athlete to appear on the cover of a U.S. men's magazine in 1998 when GQ fell for her.

Now she wants to set some long distance records. "It was great winning those first titles. Everything was new. Now I've got to prove I can pick myself up, come back and carry on winning," she says.

Just like her hero Martina Navratilova, whom she was named after when born in Slovakia, Navratilova won 16 tournaments in an amazing 22-year career.

Her mother and coach Melanie Molitor took her to Switzerland when she was eight and she was soon pressing on the door to success.

"Records are great but it would be great to show I can stay at the top. Funny, losing my No. 1 spot has helped me. I've got a new challenge," said the superstitious Hingis who always skips over tennis court lines.

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Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

Federal grand jury starts hearing evidence next week

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah (AFP) — A United States federal grand jury will begin issuing subpoenas and hearing evidence here on the bribery scandal that has rocked the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Justice Department officials confirmed to the Salt Lake Tribune and NBC plans to speak with organising committee officials of the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics bid about tax fraud and bribery charges.

Bidders and organisers gave IOC members as much as \$70,000 in cash, expensive gifts, free housing and health care, travel to scenic areas and scholarships to secure votes for Salt Lake to host the Games.

Salt Lake staffers even arranged escorts for sex both here and at overseas meetings, television station KTVX reported Thursday, citing unnamed sources.

As a result of the scandal, two top executives on the organising committee have resigned, the IOC is expected to punish 12 members and Olympic sponsors have warned to make a complete probe of all recent bid winners and organising groups or risk a massive money pullout.

The Justice Department probe could provide criminal liability for the bidders and organisers, but U.S. IOC member Anita DeFranz told organisers that no punishment would come from them and they back the committee.

"Within the hour I spoke to president Samaranch and he reiterated that we are 100 per cent behind Salt Lake City's efforts," she said. "Work is moving ahead as planned."

And there is growing objection to having taxpayers be liable for debts the city might incur if the Games go on and fundraisers cannot make deals for a remaining \$250 million of a \$1.4 billion budget.

"The IOC doesn't get to call the shots anymore. We do," said city council member Deeda Seed.

"It's our city. It's our financial disaster if sponsors back out."

Seed advocates dumping the Games back upon the IOC unless the IOC vows to cover whatever debt Salt Lake taxpayers might be liable for. DeFranz admits that completing the financial picture is the major task ahead.

"Our first priority will be to raise the revenues that are projected in our budget," she said. "We have reasons to believe it will be done."

IOC officials have met with major U.S. sponsors in the past two days to answer inquiries. None have withdrawn support but all will watch the federal grand jury's actions with keen interest on its effect upon their billions of dollars invested in the Olympic movement's golden image.

In addition to the Justice Department and IOC probes are a U.S. Olympic Committee inquiry into the mess and an investigation by a five-member independent ethics panel formed by organisers.

The ethics panel has started studying business conflicts of interests involving members of the organising committee whose private businesses stand to gain significantly through Olympic deals, said John Fowler, a liaison between the ethics panel and Utah governor Mike Leavitt.

"A concern should be raised," Fowler said. Earl Holding, owner of Snowbasin ski resort, and Alan Layton, a construction company owner, are two main organising committee members targeted in the latest revelations.

"People who do business with the Salt Lake organising committee shouldn't be on the board," said Ken Butlock, the committee member who has called for IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch's resignation.

The state of Utah will spend \$15 million to federal money to build a shortcut highway to Holding's resort from the airport, a road that will bring him a major post-Olympic benefit.

NFL champions must down Jets to make Super noise

DENVER, Colorado (AFP)

Three decades after pulling off the most stunning upset in Super Bowl history, the New York Jets will have to stage another American football shocker to stop reigning champion Denver.

Jets quarterback Vinny Testaverde faces the biggest game of his career. But Denver legend John Elway faces what could be the last game of his storied career in Sunday's National Football League semi-final here.

"It's going to be a war," Denver coach Mike Shanahan said.

A victory would give the Jets their first Super Bowl appearance since beating Baltimore 30 years ago.

Quarterback Joe Namath predicted victory over the older, more established Colts and delivered. Testaverde, known more for late-game interceptions in prior years, is 13-1 as a starter for the Jets and set a club record with 29 touchdown passes. He looks at past failures as preparation for this moment.

"I look at it all as a positive," he said. "It prepared me for this point in my life and the biggest game of my career. The big thing for me is relax and stay focused. If you worry, you make too many mistakes."

Elway has hinted at retirement after the season, a consideration he made after leading the Broncos past Green Bay to last year's Super Bowl.

"I'm not even going to let that enter my mind right now," Elway said. "The game is more important than that. I have plenty of time to decide in the off-season."

The Broncos have won 18 in a row here before a crowd that figures to be one of the loudest in National Football League history.

"How loud can the decibel level go at Mile High Stadium?" Broncos defensive end Alfred Williams asked. "Whatever the answer is, that's how loud it will be."

The Jets, 12-4, have won five of eight road games this season but rarely faced anything like the fans of Denver, 14-2.

"It's not an easy place to play," said New York center Kevin Mawae. "It's the fans. They're so loud. It's going to be wild. Throw in the fact that we're playing for the Super Bowl, and it'll be even wilder."

New York coach Bill Parcells could become the first man to guide three different teams into Super Bowls.

Parcells guided the New York Giants to two Super Bowl victories and took New England to the 1997 title game before leaving to revive a 1-13 club that critics derisively re-dubbed the Jets.

The Broncos are trying to become the first back-to-back NFL champions since Dallas completed the repeat in 1993.

Denver boasts NFL rushing leader Terrell Davis, whose 2,008 yards were the third-best season in history, and the best offence in the American Conference, just ahead of the Jets.

"Not only do they have to stop Terrell, but they've got to stop our offense," Shanahan said. "We've had people stop Terrell, then all of a sudden we score 35 points."

Rubin to play Grande in Tasmanian final

HOBART, Australia (AFP) — Italy's Rita Grande reached her first WTA final when she beat American Amy Frazier 6-3, 7-5 in a semi-final of the Tasmanian International here Friday.

Grande will meet American Chanda Rubin, who had a walkover into Saturday's final when French top seed Julie Halard-Decugis withdrew with a strained stomach muscle.

The 23-year-old Italian's greater aggression was the key in her tight match against the experienced Frazier.

She served 11 aces and frequently had Frazier on the defensive with her powerful forehand drives.

The match between the fifth-seeded Rubin and Halard-Decugis had been expected to produce the tournament winner.

But Halard-Decugis fell victim to her punishing playing schedule which included wins in the last two WTA events in Pattaya, Thailand, and Auckland.

She played six sets on Thursday, three in singles followed by three more in doubles.

She said she could not serve freely Friday and was anxious to protect herself for the Australian Open, starting on Monday.

Halard-Decugis came on to court at the end of the first semi-final, apologised to the crowd, explained what had happened and promised to come back next year.

Ali attends Tyson-Botha weigh-in

LAS VEGAS, Nevada (AFP) — Mike Tyson on Thursday weighed in at a muscled 223 pounds — the heaviest of his career — for his Saturday 10-round heavyweight fight with South African Francois Botha.

Botha scaled in at 233 at the MGM Grand casino's Grand Theater, where the proceedings took place under the gaze of boxing legend Muhammad Ali.

Tyson's previous heavyweight weight was the 222 pounds he weighed for his first fight against Evander Holyfield which he lost in the 11th round on November 9, 1996.

In their rematch on June 28, 1997, Tyson was disqualified for hitting Holyfield's ears, earning a ban that was rescinded last October.

The non-title bout against Botha will be the first appearance in the ring in 19 months for Tyson, who boasts a record of 45 victories and three defeats, with 39 of his wins coming inside the distance. Botha, 39-1 with 24 victories inside the limit, was five pounds lighter than he was for his last fight, when he stopped unheralded David Cherry in the first round on June 26. In his other fight last year — a first-round knockout of another journeyman, Stanley Johnson — Botha weighed 236.

He weighed 224 for what many consider his best showing — his failed challenge to Michael Moorer for the International Boxing Federation (IBF) title on November 9, 1996.

Ali, who lent his support to Tyson last October at the hearing where the Nevada State Athletic Commission voted to reinstate Tyson's boxing licence, posed for photographs and spoke to Tyson on the crowded stage after the weigh-in.

The former champion drew almost as many cheers from the crowd as either of Saturday's subdued contestants.



Former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson stands on the scale as he is weighed for his upcoming return to the ring against South African Francois Botha. Tyson will meet Botha January 16 in his first fight since the lifting of his suspension from boxing for biting Evander Holyfield's ear. Tyson weighed in at 223 pounds (Reuters photo)

'Scud' beats Chang on way to Classic final

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Mark Philippoussis surged into the final of the Kooyong Tennis Classic Event here Friday, coming back from a set down to defeat seasoned campaigner Michael Chang.

Philippoussis, nicknamed "Scud" for his booming serve and ferocious groundstrokes, overcame an early set back to win 6-7 (2/7) 7-5 6-3 in two hours 26 minutes to set up a showdown with Sweden's Thomas Enqvist in Saturday's final.

The 22-year-old Melbourne favourite and defending Kooyong Classic champion is rated one of the Australian Open favourites by bookmakers after a string of impressive recent performances.

Against Chang, he used a touch of gamesmanship to break his American opponent's concentration and clinch the second set after going into a 6-5 lead, when he munched on a confectionary stick from a spectator before washing it down with a drink, causing a delay. Philippoussis, who is expected to play compatriot Patrick Rafter in the fourth round of the Australian Open in a replay of their U.S. Open final last September, chuckled at the incident.

"I think it was a lemon stick, I love those things."



Michael Chang

and it was a bit too much for me so I had to have a drink to wash it down...it was perfect, they were the tactics there to try and break him and it worked," he said.

While all this was going on Chang was fuming at the other end of the court.

"Of course I was irritated. I lost the next

seven points and three games, it's a lesson I should have learned a long time ago," he said later.

It was only

Philippoussis' second win in six matches against the never-say-die Chang and another pointer that he has his best chance of performing well before his home crowd at the Australian Open.

Philippoussis was asked whether he was suffering the same way as compatriot Patrick Rafter does under the weight of national expectation heading into his home grand slam. "You've got crowd support, you've got your friends and family here. I love it," he replied.

"It doesn't worry me where I play. I'm going to play the same way no matter where I am."

Chang, recovering from an injury-riddled 1998, said he felt his game was now coming round after his ranking slumped from three at the start of last year to year-end 29.

"Hopefully all the injuries are behind me and I come into '99 feeling healthy and looking forward to bigger and better things," said Chang, who has won the Kooyong Classic three times.

Elsewhere in Friday's action at the Classic, Sweden's Mikael Tillstrom — substituting for Goran Ivanisevic, who withdrew from the event to nurse a back injury for next week's grand slam — thumped England's Tim Henman, 7-5, 6-1 and Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov beat Petr Korda 1-6, 6-1, 6-2.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF
& TAMMAM HIRSH
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PLAY OR DEFEND?

Neither vulnerable. South deals.

NORTH

♠ Q 3

♥ 8 5 4 2

♦ 7 6 3

♣ Q J 8 4

EAST

♠ 10 9 8 5

♥ J 9 6 3

♦ Q 9

♣ 10 7 5

SOUTH

♠ A K

♥ A K Q

♦ A 8 5 4 2

♣ A 9 3

The bidding:

SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST

2♠ Pass 2♠ Pass

2NT Pass 3♠ Pass

3♠ Pass 3NT Pass

Opening lead: Ten of ♠

Study this layout, then decide whether you would rather play or defend three no trump after a spade lead.

In the modern style South's bidding showed a balanced hand of 23-24 points. North checked for a pos-

sible 4-4 heart fit before settling in three no trump.

But for the unfortunate duplication in spades, three no trump would have been a cakewalk. With any lead but a spade, declarer would have time to set up diamonds, but now that line is doomed. An even heart break would see declarer home, but the cards are not that friendly here. All in all, it might seem right to defend.

But there is still one chance: West must hold the ten of clubs and East the king. After winning the spade lead, declarer should first test the hearts. When that possibility comes to naught, South must lead a low club from hand and finesse dummy's eight! East takes the king and, no matter what is returned, declarer wins and scores two spade tricks, three hearts, one diamond and three clubs — nine in all.

Not so fast, you say. What if East refuses to win the king of clubs, an effective defense had declarer led a low club to one of dummy's honors? Well, then declarer is in dummy, and leads the queen of clubs for a finesse! Whether or not East covers, declarer still comes to three club tricks and nine overall.

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Netanyahu receives boost in opinion polls ahead of elections

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's popularity has shot up ahead of May's elections, with opinion polls Friday showing him running neck-and-neck with his main rival, Labour chief Ehud Barak.

Just one month ago the embattled Netanyahu was forced to call early elections for parliament and prime minister on May 17 after he lost his majority in the Knesset.

He had come under attack over his handling of October's Wye River accords with the Palestinians, with the right wing accusing him of giving away Jewish land and the left asserting he was destroying the peace process.

But in recent weeks Netanyahu, who took office in June 1996, has increased his standing both in the country as a whole, and inside his Likud Party.

As far as domestic policies are concerned, his government has boosted its support among economically disadvantaged groups by adopting a number of social measures which it had previously opposed.

They include extending free education, and cancelling benefit cuts to the elderly, in what Netanyahu's opponents described as "election economics."

And his attacks on Labour, accusing the party of weakness towards the Palestinians and wanting to "divide" Jerusalem, seem to be bearing fruit among parts of the electorate, the polls suggest.

There have been defections from Likud to both left and right, but he has been able to limit the damage, keeping some important waverers within the fold. In particular, he has apparently persuaded the popular Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai — whom Barak was hoping to woo — to stay with him.

Netanyahu still faces former defence and foreign minister Moshe Arens in the party primaries on Feb. 8, but Likud internal polls show Arens receiving only 25 per cent of the vote, compared to 60 per cent for Netanyahu.

Not that the battle is won. "Netanyahu has started off well, but there's a long way yet to go," the daily Yediot Aharanot commented.

Barak has had an easier ride so far. He is now unchallenged within the Labour Party, having been confirmed as its candidate on Thursday, in spite of reservations from some party members who accuse him of arrogance.

His success came after he managed to thrash out a compromise deal with the party leadership on how to distribute top spots on the party slate, giving him leeway to make last-minute electoral alliances, notably with the Geshar party of Netanyahu's former Foreign Minister David Levy.

But he can no longer feel comfortable facing the outgoing prime minister. A survey of voter intentions in Yediot Aharanot showed both men with 43 per cent of the votes in a second round run-off in elections

for prime minister, while 14 per cent were undecided.

Only marginally more comforting was a poll in the Maariv newspaper which gave Netanyahu 46 per cent, narrowly behind Barak at 47 per cent, with seven per cent undecided.

The same polls indicate that the appearance of a new centrist candidate, the highly respected former army chief Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, has made no difference to Netanyahu's chances.

They show him gaining only 16 per cent of votes in the first round, eliminating him from the race.

Netanyahu's increased standing is all the more worrying for Labour because previous experience has shown the left usually keeps its lead in the polls until the very last minute, when undecided voters swing to the right.

"For the moment, Netanyahu's popularity has not wavered among the three social groups which gave him victory in the May 1996 elections; Russian Jews, Sephardic [Oriental] Jews and religious groups," poll specialist Rafi Smith told AFP.

Those are precisely the groups which are growing fastest among Israel's Jewish citizens, who account for 80 per cent of the electorate.

The influx of Russian Jews, and the natural increase in population means that there will be 300,000 more voters in May 1999 than there were for the 1996 elections, according to the Central Electoral Commission.



Tens of thousands of Palestinian worshippers on Friday pray at Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest shrine. An estimated 400,000 people prayed at the mosque on the last Friday of the month of Ramadan (Reuters photo)

Al Aqsa preacher slams Mideast peace process, Israeli elections

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — An Al Aqsa mosque preacher slammed the peace process as a cover for Israeli expansionism in a fiery sermon to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians on the last Friday of the fasting month of Ramadan.

"The peace agreements are but a temporary stage to give strength for the Israeli entity to expand at the expense of the Palestinians," Sheikh Ahmad Al Saadat said in his sermon to a crowd estimated by Israeli police at 250,000 and by Palestinian radio at

400,000.

"Arabs and Muslims have to understand the truth that our struggle in Palestine is a religious one between Islam and its enemies," he said.

The Al Aqsa compound in Jerusalem's Old City is Islam's third holiest site. The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians has come to a halt after the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided not to carry out the second military withdrawal from the West Bank called for by the October Wye River

Memorandum.

The process has also been in limbo since Netanyahu called general elections where the key issue is the handling of negotiations with the Palestinians.

Saadat said that as far as Palestinians were concerned, there was little difference between the candidates in the May 17 Israeli elections for parliament and prime minister.

"The differences are only in the names. The plurality of political parties in Israel does not concern us. We

Palestinians do not see one as being better than the other," he said.

"There is no difference between Likud and Labour and there is no difference between the Third Way and the centre. All of them serve Israeli society and the Zionist project which seeks to occupy our land and Judaize Jerusalem," Saadat said.

The three front-runners in the race for prime minister are Labour party leader Ehud Barak, former army general Amnon Lipkin-Shahak and Netanyahu.

Palestinian backing for anti-Israeli violence hits four-year high — poll

NABLUS (AFP) — Support in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for armed attacks on Israelis has reached a four-year high, according to a Palestinian poll published Friday.

Fifty-three per cent of the 1,319 Palestinians surveyed said they favored armed attacks on Israeli targets, compared to 41 per cent who opposed them, the Nablus-based Center for Palestinian Research and Studies said.

The remaining six per cent of the sample in the poll taken Jan. 7-9 expressed no opinion.

The poll found the widest backing for anti-Israeli violence among West Bank and Gaza Palestinians since November 1994, when 57 per cent of those questioned said they approved of such attacks. The survey had a three percent margin of error, the Center said.

In a similar poll in 1996, only 21 per cent of Palestinians backed anti-Israeli attacks.

This support had grown to 44 per cent by last August, then dipped to 41 per cent the day after Israel and the self-rule Palestinian National Authority signed

the Wye River Memorandum in October.

Nevertheless, 60 per cent of those questioned said they favor going the diplomatic route. Some 57 per cent said they want a Palestinian state declared May 4, without Israeli agreement, while 36 per cent were opposed and the rest gave no opinion.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has frequently said he will declare an independent state on that date, when the five-year interim period under the Oslo autonomy accords lapses.

On the Israeli elections scheduled for May 17, some 70 per cent said they did not differentiate between the three main candidates for prime minister on their attitudes toward Palestinians.

But 17 per cent said they preferred Labour Party leader Ehud Barak, four per cent said they wanted to see former military chief of staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak win and two per cent wished that incumbent Benjamin Netanyahu would be returned to office. The rest said they had no opinion.

Sharon says Palestinians serious about declaring state

PARIS (AP) — Assessing Palestinian intentions on declaring an independent state, Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon said Friday that he was taking the possibility seriously.

Sharon, the hawkish former defence minister, reiterated at a news conference at the end of a three-day visit to Paris, that the Palestinians should be dissuaded from taking such a step.

Throughout his visit, Sharon outlined his view of a Palestinian state: an entity

with very limited sovereignty and whose security at borders, ports and airports would be overseen by Israel.

"The Palestinians are repeating again and again that they are going to declare unilaterally an independent state with its capital Jerusalem," Sharon said, speaking in English. "I generally think that one should take seriously declarations of this kind," he added.

As he has during his entire trip, Sharon stressed that "the Israeli position is very clear on this issue. We will not accept any unilateral declaration." Those who did not seek to deter the Palestinians from unilaterally declaring their own state would bear responsibility for what might happen should such an event occur, Sharon said.

"If somebody really wants to contribute to peace in the Middle East, to less tension in the Middle East... he should convince the Palestinians not to take unilateral steps," Sharon said.

He repeated his threat that

Israel would annex immediately any parts of Palestinian territory not now under Palestinian control if a state were proclaimed without Israeli agreement.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has threatened to declare a state May 4, the target date set by the Oslo accords for completing a permanent peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians.

In Sharon's view, Israel would enjoy the right to occupy a Palestinian state at will. The state, he repeated, would

be prohibited from signing agreements with nations that threatened Israel's security. Although the peace process is currently practically at a standstill, Sharon said progress could be made despite Israel's current preoccupation with elections scheduled for May 17.

"They comply, we apply," said Sharon, referring to the Oslo accords and the Wye memorandum. "They fail to comply, we do not apply the next stage. It is as simple as that."

Israel attacks south Lebanon as guerrillas mark 'Al Quds Day'

NABATTYEH (AP) — Israeli jets and artillery attacked suspected guerrilla positions in southern Lebanon Friday after Iranian-backed guerrillas staged hit-and-run attacks against occupation forces, security officials said.

The 15 coordinated attacks by Lebanese Shiite Muslim guerrillas of Hizbollah were staged to mark "Al Quds Day," an Iranian-inspired event to protest Israel's hold on Jerusalem.

Al Quds is the Arabic name for Jerusalem. "The war of attrition against the enemy will continue... until we force it to withdraw without any conditions," Hizbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrullah told thousands of supporters at a south Beirut rally Friday to mark

"Al Quds Day." There was no immediate word on casualties from the flare-up in southern Lebanon. Israel reported attacks by its aircraft on the eastern sector of the Israeli-occupied zone and said all planes returned safely to base.

Hizbollah, or the Party of God, is leading the fight to dislodge Israeli troops and allies Lebanese militiamen from the occupied zone, which makes up about 10 per cent of Lebanon's territory.

The Lebanese security officials said hostilities began in the early morning with rocket, mortar and machine gun attacks against Israeli troops and the South Lebanon Army, a militia group armed and financed by Israel.

The officials, who spoke on

customary condition of anonymity, had no immediate word on the extent of damage on the targeted positions.

But Hizbollah said in a statement issued in Beirut that its fighters scored "direct hits... destroying installations and fortifications and sparking fires."

In the third straight day of attacks by Israeli aircraft, two planes fired two missiles at suspected guerrilla positions near the village of Mlita in Iqlim Al Tuffah, a mountain stronghold facing the occupied enclave, said the officials.

They said Israeli artillery also pounded positions across from the occupied zone.

Hizbollah guerrillas have often used the Iqlim Al Tuffah, about 10 kilometres

north of the market town of Nabatiyyeh, to launch attacks on Israeli troops and their militia allies.

The air raid was the ninth on southern Lebanon this year. Israeli warplanes struck in the south twice on Thursday and five times on Wednesday.

Hizbollah marks "Al Quds Day" every year with attacks against Israeli forces. Israel's concentrated air raids earlier in the week appeared to be pre-emptive strikes to keep the guerrillas off-balance in the run-up to the occasion.

But Nasrullah, Hizbollah's secretary-general, said the stepped up air strikes in recent days marked a new Israeli policy to counter every guerrilla attack with an air raid.

"We welcome that... the

raids will not curb our operations. After all, we yearn to die and be martyrs," he told Friday's rally in the south Beirut neighbourhood of Bir Al Abed following a military parade by hundreds of Hizbollah's guerrillas shouting "Death to Israel" and "Oh, Jerusalem, we are coming."

Although Hizbollah's declared strategy is to liberate south Lebanon, the guerrilla group has also sided with activist Palestinian and other Islamist factions in their call for the destruction of the Jewish state.

Israel has controlled the Lebanese border zone one way or another for more than 20 years, saying it was necessary to protect its northern flank from guerrilla attacks.

U.S. releases Ben Laden wanted poster

WASHINGTON (R) — The United States released wanted posters for Saudi dissident Osama Ben Laden on Thursday, offering up to \$5 million for information leading to his arrest or conviction on charges of bombing two U.S. embassies.

The posters show colour pictures of Ben Laden in his white urban and of rescue operations at the U.S. embassy in Nairobi on Aug. 7. They offer "absolute confidentiality" and possible relocation for the informers and their families.

A New York court has indicted Ben Laden and 11 of his associates for the twin bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, which killed more than 250 people, including 12 Americans. The United States announced the \$5 million reward in November.

"This reward offer has already generated leads that are

being investigated," State Department spokesman James Rubin told his daily briefing. He did not elaborate.

The posters, which also offer money for Mohammad Atef, the military commander of Ben Laden's group, will be distributed to all U.S. diplomatic missions abroad. There are versions in five languages — English, Arabic, French, Dari and Baluchi.

"We will vigorously advertise this offer around the world. We will advertise it on the Internet, where we can reach over 100 million subscribers. We are considering other avenues, including paid advertising and matchbooks," Rubin said.

The reward offer is part of the U.S. government's "Heroes" programme, which has paid out more than \$6 million to informers in about 20 cases. Ben Laden comes from a

wealthy Saudi construction business family but has been stripped of his Saudi citizenship. Since leaving Sudan in 1996, he has been living in Afghanistan, where the leaders of the Taliban movement say he is their guest.

After the embassy bombings, the United States fired cruise missiles at training camps allegedly run by Ben Laden in Afghanistan and at a Sudanese pharmaceutical factory the United States claims was preparing to make chemical weapons.

Ben Laden has denied organising the embassy bombings, but in an interview published in Time magazine this month he said it was his task to instigate others to such acts.

He also said U.S. efforts to disrupt his finances have had little effect. U.S. officials estimate Ben Laden has assets worth about \$300 million.

Movement behind the scenes as Clinton trial resumes

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Lawmakers grappled behind the scenes with how to proceed with President Bill Clinton's impeachment trial as prosecutors opened a second day of arguing for his removal.

The 13 House-appointed trial "managers" resumed their legal case by focusing on the severity of the charges of perjury and obstruction of justice against Clinton stemming from efforts to hide his affair with Monica Lewinsky.

The ornate Senate chamber had turned into the battleground for the fight of Clinton's political life Thursday as all three U.S. government branches mobilised for the first such trial since 1868.

Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist — who swore Clinton in as president in 1993 and 1997 — presided over the trial which resumed at 1:00 p.m. (1800 GMT).

As arguments were heard in the Senate, a second front in the impeachment battle had opened up in lawmakers' offices and conference rooms, site of a dispute over whether to call the scandal's key players — perhaps even Clinton — to testify.

Inviting Clinton is "an idea that appears to be percolating... it's obviously on a lot of people's minds," said John Czwartacki, a spokesman for Republican Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott.

Some senators think that "if he testified, there'd be a need for only one witness," said Czwartacki, without giving any further details.

The White House Friday denounced the call for witnesses as an "obsessive desire" of Republican prosecutors that "demonstrates an admission of a fundamental weakness in the case."

Speaking on a flight to New York with Clinton, White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said prosecutors "don't believe their case is strong enough. So they're trying to expand it."

"Everything that has been presented has been presented before," he said. "There is nothing new."

Lott had a ready response to that charge, saying in a statement: "If they wish something new, they have only to grant the House managers' desire to call live witnesses."

Republican Henry Hyde, the lead man-

ager, first raised the issue of calling Clinton as a witness on Wednesday, telling reporters "We can request the Senate to invite the president to come over... we may do that."

That brought an angry response from Lockhart, who said it proved the case against Clinton "is really about politics."

The White House has maintained that Clinton will not appear at the trial in person, and under impeachment rules first written in the 18th century and subsequently refined, it is unclear whether the Senate could compel him to do so.

Before the opening arguments in the second presidential impeachment trial in U.S. history were even finished, the White House blasted what it termed an "unsubstantiated and circumstantial" case.

But a Clinton advisor and former senior administration official told The Washington Post the impact of the case and Clinton's determination not to comment on it was "brutal."



Burglar tries to sell phone to victim

NEW YORK (AP) — A burglar was nabbed after answering a stolen cell phone — and agreeing to sell it back to the man from whom it was taken. Stanley Seewald had the phone and some other items stolen from his home early Thursday. Police were canvassing the neighbourhood when Seewald suggested that he dial the cell phone number. At first, the man at the other end would say hello and then hang up. But Seewald persisted, screaming into the phone. "I can't hear you! I can't hear you!" Finally, after Seewald said he needed the phone for work, the suspect offered to sell it back for \$80. Seewald even haggled over the price.

Motorists safe from traffic cops

HARARE (AFP) — Motorists in Zimbabwe's capital Harare can flout parking laws without fear of a fine because the cash-strapped city council has run out of books of tickets, a state-controlled newspaper reported Friday. The council's 80 traffic wardens have been spending their time playing ping-pong at their headquarters since the tickets ran out 10 days ago, according to the daily Herald. Efforts to secure new books had failed, the newspaper said, costing the council about \$5,000 a day in lost fines.

Man crashes car as 50 pagers ring

KIEV (R) — A Ukrainian businessman who bought a pager for each member of his staff as a New Year gift was so alarmed when all 50 of them went off at the same time that he drove his car into a lamp post, a newspaper said Thursday. The unnamed businessman was returning from the pager shop when the accident happened, the Fakty daily reported. "With no more than 100 metres to go to the office, the 50 pagers on the back seat suddenly burst out screaming. The businessman's fright was such that he simply let go of the steering wheel and the car ploughed into a lamp post."

Stressful life for lobsters is no day at the beach

BOSTON (R) — Physical stress from changes in water temperature and competition for food probably caused a bacterial outbreak that killed hundreds of lobsters off Maine's coast last fall, researchers said Wednesday. Maine's Department of Marine Resources teamed up with the University of Maine/New Hampshire Sea Grant College Program and the Lobster Health Research Centre of Prince Edward Island in Canada to determine what caused the bacterial outbreak that killed \$2 million worth of the crustaceans.

Try polygamy, professor says

JOHANNESBURG (R) — An Afrikaner theology professor says South Africa should legalise polygamy to whites to beat a divorce rate amongst the highest in the world. The Citizen newspaper reported Friday. "Timesharing awaits us ladies. And that at a time when Viagra was sent for men," quoted Christina Landman, a theology professor at the University of South Africa in Pretoria and member of the conservative Reformed Church, as saying. Only one in three South African marriages endures, and Landman argued that polygamy would allow a husband to take on additional mistresses without feeling betrayed. No option but that, she said.

Ben Picassos recovered in Sp

BARCELONA (AFP) — Spanish police recovered a large number of stolen artworks on Friday, including a Picasso painting and a Rembrandt. The police said they had recovered the works after a long search. The artworks were found in a house in Ribes de Molins, near the Mediterranean coast. Three suspects were arrested, but no names were available.